Gang IQ

Can you tell a wannabe from the real thing? Page 27

APRIL 2008

neatoday

GOING, GOING, GONE.

When teaching gets surreal, what keeps educators from packing it in?

SEE PAGE 21

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EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

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Why They Leave

COVER STORY Sometimes today's schools feel more like a *Dilbert* cartoon than places of learning. But educators aren't laughing. Lack of funding, disrespect, and NCLB are driving many to leave the profession. What can we do to get them to stay?

27 | STUDENT LIFE

In a Gangster's Paradise

Learn how to identify the gang-bangers in your classroom and ways to stop the spread in schools.

17 | RIGHTS WATCH

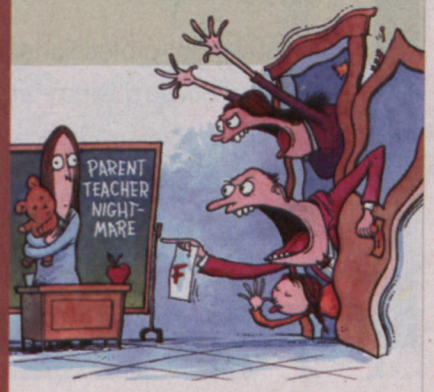
The Whole World (Wide Web) is Watching

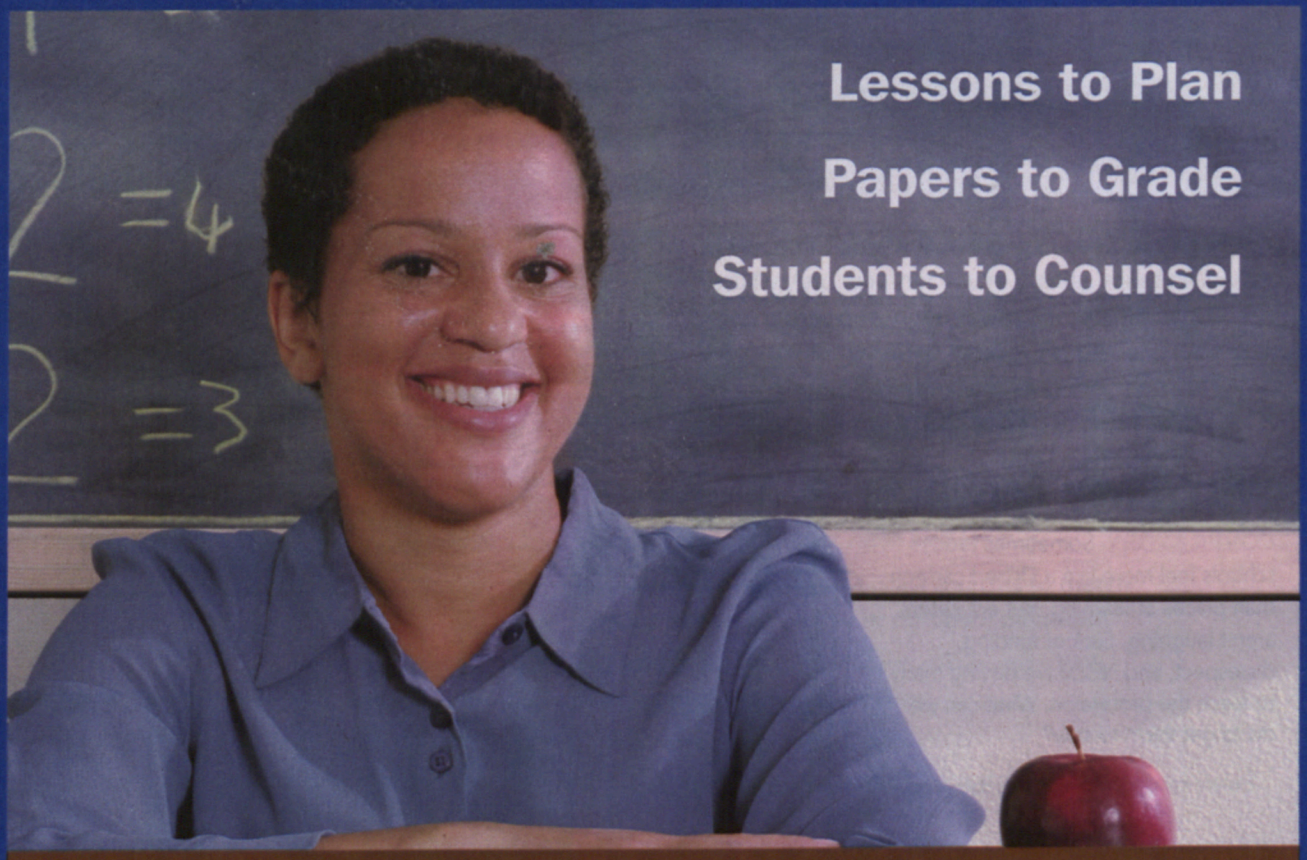
What you post on MySpace in your free time might just cost you your job.

30 | TRY THIS

How can you deal with angry parents?

Tips for defusing tense situations and getting the parent-teacher relationship back on positive ground.





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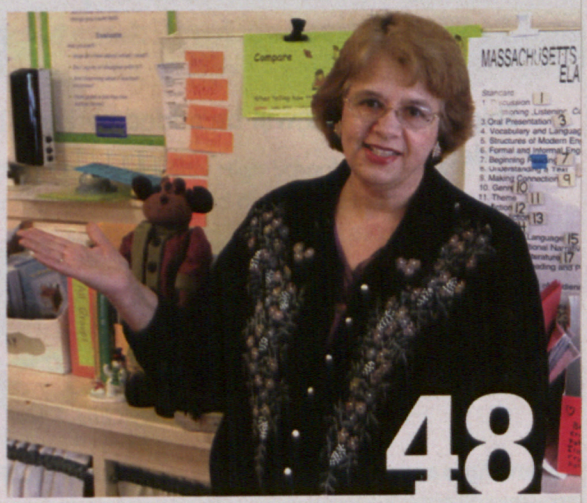

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ART DIRECTION, STYLING, ILLUSTRATION: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.

PHOTOS PAGE 1
FROM TOP—CHRISTOPHER BARTH, ILLUSTRATION: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.; BOTTOM LEFT: NORMAN Y. LONO; ILLUSTRATION BOTTOM: DAVID CLARK

PHOTOS PAGE 3
FROM TOP—WALL: MLADEN DJORDJEVIC, BOY: STOCKBYTE; WOMAN WITH PLANT: MEIKO ARQUILLOS; BUS DRIVER: PATRICK RUMAKER/NJEA; BULLETIN BOARD: SLYVIA OBERLE; TEACHER: CHRIS CHRISTO

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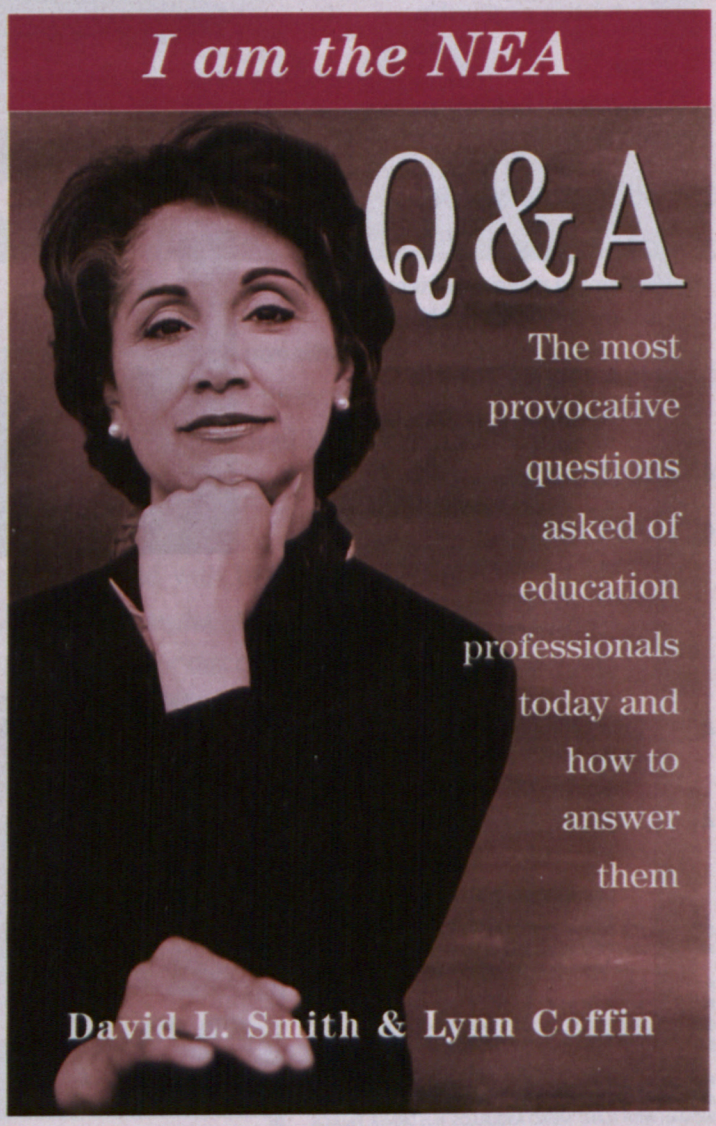
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The most provocative questions asked of education professionals today and how to answer them
David L. Smith & Lynn Coffin

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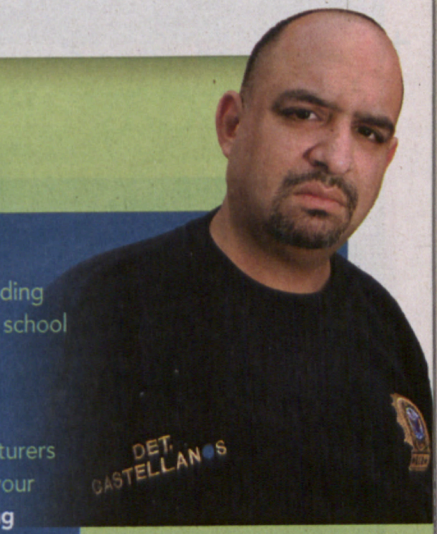
TOP CLICKS



Gangsters' Paradise

With police officers like Javier Castellanos (at right) meeting more gangsters in less likely places, including your hometown, it's time to test your Gang IQ. What do gang members say? (Or spray, as in, on your school walls.) What do they wear? Take our gang awareness quiz to learn more. **www.nea.org/ref?gangs**

Global Warming 101

National Geographic Explorer Will Steger and a team of young adventurers from around the world bring their High Arctic dogsled expedition to your classroom just in time for Earth Day. **www.nea.org/ref?globalwarming**

In Person

We have a horsewoman, a Seminole Nation tribal leader, and a teacher who swims with turtles in Costa Rica. And, tell us what makes you a great candidate for an In Person profile! **www.nea.org/ref?inperson**

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POLL

Has your district ever taken measures to racially integrate your school? Here's what nea.org visitors had to say.

IN YOUR WORDS

What's the first sign of spring fever at your school?

When we first moved into a new school, the landscaping was nothing but overgrown shrubs. With a grant, we bought 600 tulip bulbs for each child to plant. When the tulips start blooming, what a sight it is to see.
DEB GELENIUS, Ohio

At Perry High School in snowy Michigan, it's the sound of flip flops in the hall!
DONNA GAYON, Michigan

How about 300 students dressed in snorkels and floaties on our annual beach day?
SUE COLBY, Illinois

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! *Share your stories at* **www.nea.org/forums.**

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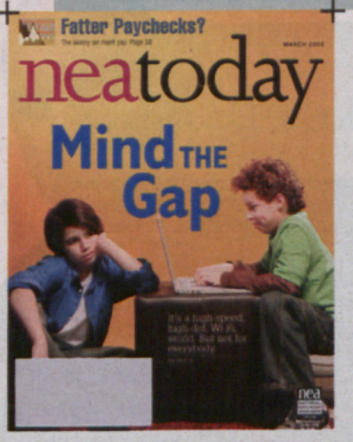

Supervision Needed

Technology can hurt as easily as it can help ("Minding the Gap," March). As a former science department chairman and physics instructor, I watched computer usage balloon with the advent of broadband high speed Internet, and I saw the problems and advantages multiply. Children under 16 years of age, for example, have no business using the Internet unless supervised by an adult, nor do they have any business in chat rooms. It is sad to see kids isolated from the world behind screaming MP3 players, busy punching their thumbs on their cell phones to send cryptic text messages. Adult supervision is the only answer. Teachers can do a lot to show students how to use the Internet for knowledge and empowerment while avoiding the snares and traps.

JOHN OCCHUIZZO *Greensburg, Pennsylvania*

THE SEXUALIZATION OF GIRLS

I just wanted to thank you for an article that expresses what I've been thinking for a long time ("Lolita in the Classroom," March). I teach eighth-graders and the clothing that some of these girls wear is degrading to them as young women. I see more cleavage and thong underwear than I ever did in my life, and trust me, I'm not "looking," as one girl said to me when I commented on her clothing. It's the last thing I want to see as I navigate the classroom trying to educate these young minds.

MARLA THOMAS
Sandusky, Ohio

'SOULJA BOY' MEANS WHAT?!

Oh, boy. You guys have no idea what that song is about, do you? ("Teachers Crank that Soulja Boy," Upfront, March) And I'm willing to bet most teachers have no idea what nastiness they are dancing to. I highly recommend somebody on your staff become a lot more in touch with the language of our kids. Ignorance is no excuse, and playing that song in school could bring on disciplinary action.

JULIE HUNT BARNHARDT
Fremont, Michigan

EDITOR'S NOTE:
Many readers were offended at our inclusion of the Soulja Boy feature last month. We were aware of the song's lyrics, and, in evaluating the pros and cons of the story, we decided that it's important for NEA Today *to reflect what your colleagues actually are doing in the classroom to reach disengaged students. We invite all readers to join an online discussion (www.nea.org/ref?souljaboy) on the appropriateness of using hip-hop and other popular music in the classroom.*

OFFENSIVE STEREOTYPES

"Support for Gay Educators on the Rise" (Upfront, October) reported that more individuals in the general population than ever before are in favor of job security for GLBT educators. Great news! In that article, you also included a quote that perpetuates stereotypes of gay men and is offensive and detrimental to GLBT educators and students.

In my job as a high school counselor I have done considerable work with GLBT youth. One of the biggest problems, especially for young gay men, is lack of role models. The media, and even society as a whole, tells them that they have a certain place to fill—that of being flamboyant and creative (hairdressers and interior decorators). The young gay men that I counsel who have scholastic, athletic, or technical skills and talents often feel they can't come out because there's no place in society for them. GLBT individuals are more accepted in our society today than ever before, but there are still certain preconceptions and stereotypes that are limiting. The quote should never have been published.

RICK RICHARDS
Omaha, Nebraska

EDITOR'S NOTE:
We appreciate Rick Richards highlighting the error. NEA is dedicated to promoting diversity in our schools and society, in creating public schools where all students feel safe and are valued for their individuality, and in helping our members help all students reach their full potential.

NEA Today (ISSN 0734-7219) is published eight times a year, monthly, in September, October, November, January, February, March, April, and May by the National Education Association, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036-3290.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *NEA Today*, Attn: NEA Financial & Membership Services Address Change, Suite 420, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Telephone: (202) 822-7065.

NEA Today is mailed to all NEA members as a benefit of membership. Nonmember subscription prices: $65 for institution subscriptions; $100 for individual domestic and foreign subscriptions. For members, subscriptions represent $4.55 of annual dues.

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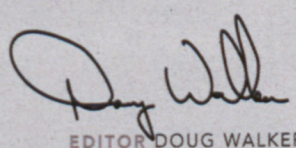
Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

SEARCHING FOR A CURE

It's been a tough flu season. My wife got it this year. So did her boss, a number of our relatives, and lots of kids we know. So, likewise, did several of my colleagues, and, chances are, so did several of yours. There's never a good time to catch the flu, especially when someone is counting on you. We salute substitutes and those of you who pulled double duty to cover a colleague's illness.

As you read this, the flu season is just about over, but there's still an epidemic in our schools—the attrition of new educators as they leave the profession after only a few years. What's ailing them? Our cover story (page 21) looks at the top reasons they're giving up on public education and offers ways to cure the system and keep talented educators (teachers and paraprofessionals) in the classroom.

And, if the prospect of dealing with difficult parents makes you ill, check out Try This on page 30.



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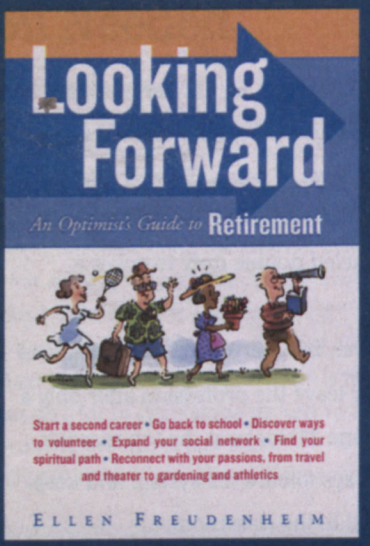
What are you looking forward to?

Most of us dream about the day we can retire, but few actually plan for the day after. Thanks to increased life expectancy, you could have 20 to 30 post-retirement years to enjoy.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Our mission is to advocate for education professionals and to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.

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These principles guide our work and define our mission:

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY. We believe public education is the gateway to opportunity. All students have the human and civil right to a quality public education that develops their potential, independence, and character.

A JUST SOCIETY. We believe public education is vital to building respect for the worth, dignity, and equality of every individual in our diverse society.

DEMOCRACY. We believe public education is the cornerstone of our republic. Public education provides individuals with the skills to be involved, informed, and engaged in our representative democracy.

PROFESSIONALISM. We believe that the expertise and judgment of education professionals are critical to student success. We maintain the highest professional standards, and we expect the status, compensation, and respect due all professionals.

PARTNERSHIP. We believe partnerships with parents, families, communities, and other stakeholders are essential to quality public education and student success.

COLLECTIVE ACTION. We believe individuals are strengthened when they work together for the common good. As education professionals, we improve both our professional status and the quality of public education when we unite and advocate collectively.

IT'S NOT BRAIN SURGERY!

Why teachers leave and why they stay

Nobody enters the teaching profession for the money. We are called to teach by our love of children, our reverence for knowledge, and our desire to make a difference.

Money is not the main reason cited by most who leave the profession, either. The majority of teachers who quit do so because they are frustrated and unhappy with their working conditions.

It doesn't have to be this way. All new teachers are bound to encounter some disappointment, but if they are treated with respect and given the tools they need to do their jobs, they can retain their dedication and passion for education.

Unfortunately, too many teachers don't get the respect they deserve or the resources they need. That's why almost one out of every five public school teachers will change jobs this year, and almost half of today's new teachers will leave the profession within five years.

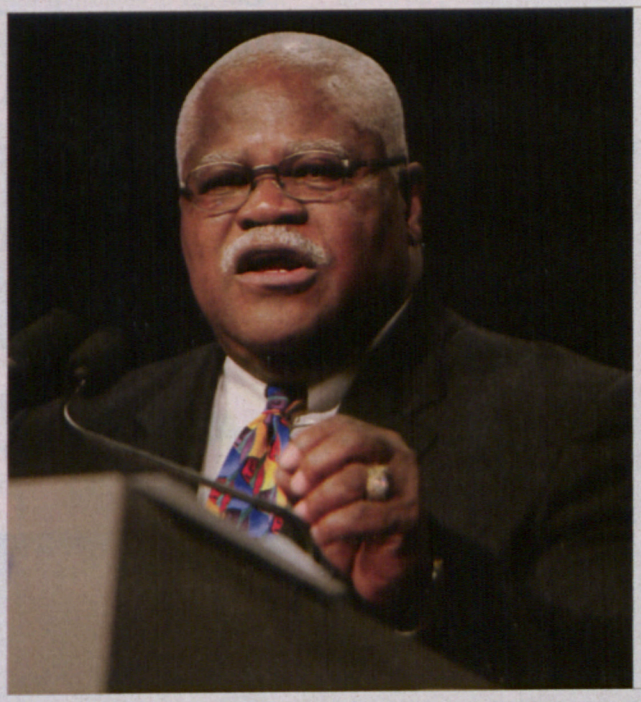

PHOTO: CALVIN KNIGHT

> "The exodus of teachers from our profession poses a critical challenge to our nation's public schools, and NEA is working hard to meet this challenge."
>
> —Reg Weaver

The exodus of teachers from our profession poses a critical challenge to our nation's public schools, and NEA is working hard to meet this challenge. We can't do it alone, though. We need the help of local school districts, state lawmakers, parents, and community leaders who share our vision of a great public school for every child. With their help, we can give educators the kind of support that will make their classroom experiences rewarding for them and their students.

This is already happening in hundreds of school districts around the nation, where local NEA affiliates have formed innovative partnerships to support new teachers. Over the past decade, 68 of these programs have been recognized for their excellence with the NEA-Saturn/United Auto Workers Partnership Award.

All of these programs have been tailored to the specific needs of their communities, but the best ones have certain things in common.

First and foremost, district officials treat professional educators as allies, not adversaries. We are given a seat at the table and a voice in the process. The experience of our members is valued, and our ideas are incorporated into the programs and policies of the districts.

Another thing these programs have in common is a focus on meaningful training and mentoring for new teachers. Meetings between new teachers and mentors are regular and ongoing, and the mentors in most cases receive some kind of compensation.

Finally, the most important thing these programs have in common is the results they achieve. New teachers who participate in these programs are more confident in the classroom. Retention rates are higher—virtually 100 percent in some of these districts. And student achievement has improved.

These programs showcase Team NEA at work and confirm that when teachers are given respect and treated as partners, we can make their jobs more fulfilling and rewarding. When that happens, they stay in teaching, benefiting their schools, their communities, and most importantly, their students.

Reg Weaver

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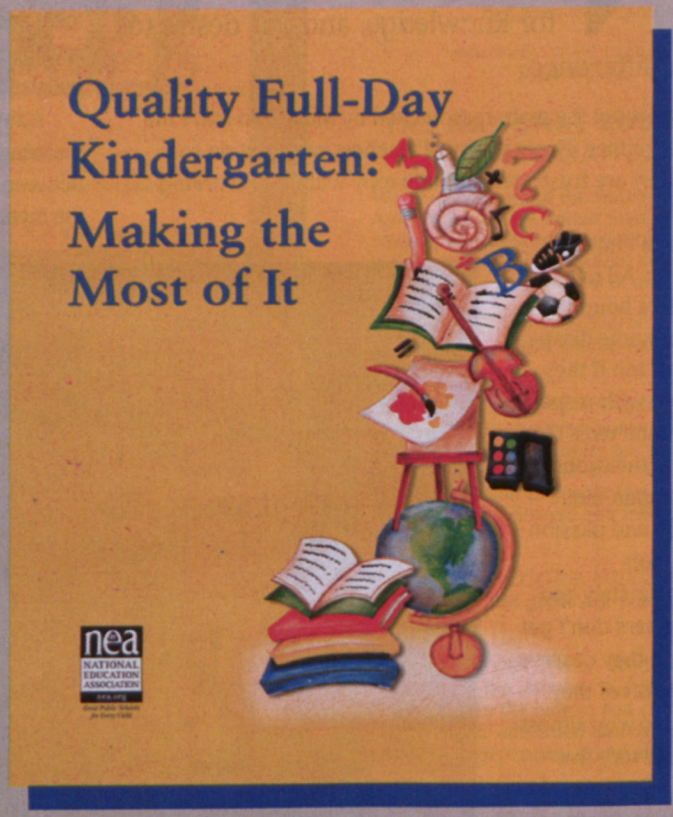

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Elephants on Parade for Public Schools

SOME OF THE STRONGEST advocates for public education during the upcoming election season have three important letters next to "NEA" on their calling cards—"GOP." An estimated 1 million of NEA's 3.2 million members are Republicans, which translates to significant influence on Republican candidates mulling over their education policy and funding platforms.

Florida teacher Sandra Ross left NEA's first-ever Republican Leaders Conference in Minneapolis this past summer energized and ready to lobby candidates in national, state, and local elections. She even attended a debate in her home state where she met five of the eight GOP '08 presidential hopefuls. She stressed to them "that there are many Republican educators out there [to appeal to] for their votes" by supporting public education.

Across the country, other loud-and-proud Republican NEA members are speaking at local political club meetings and even landing themselves on political leadership committees to try to advance NEA's agenda for public education.

Jerome Hoynes of Illinois is taking his advocacy to the Internet. Inspired by what he learned at the conference, he developed www.elephanteducators.org, with the intention of "motivating more Republican educators to join our efforts," says Hoynes.

Our advice to candidates: Don't consider GOP NEA educators the silent elephant in the room.

Hollywood Science **12**

Neighborhood Smarts **13**

Retro: 30 Years Ago **14**

CAPITOL DOME: NANCY BRAMMER; ELEPHANTS: DENISE KAPPA; GRASS: PICHUGIN DMITRY; PHOTO COLLAGE: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.

Real Science or Hollywood Access?

SCIENCE CLASS ONCE WAS DOMINATED BY DISSECTED FROGS AND BUNSEN BURNERS. TODAY, THANKS TO THE POPULARITY OF PRIME-TIME CRIME SHOWS, THINK MORE OF HAIR ANALYSIS AND MAKE-SHIFT GRISLY CRIME SCENES.

IN JESSICA ASHLEY'S FORENSIC SCIENCE class, students examine, for example, the velocity and angle of blood splatter in solving a crime. But they're really tackling physics and geometry. "That's one of the great things about this class," explains Ashley, of Athens High School in Troy, Michigan. "Students don't really know they're learning."

But what exactly are they learning? Although the so-called "CSI Effect" has attracted many previously uninterested students to science education, its detractors hope they aren't getting an unrealistic view of forensic science or scientific methodology.

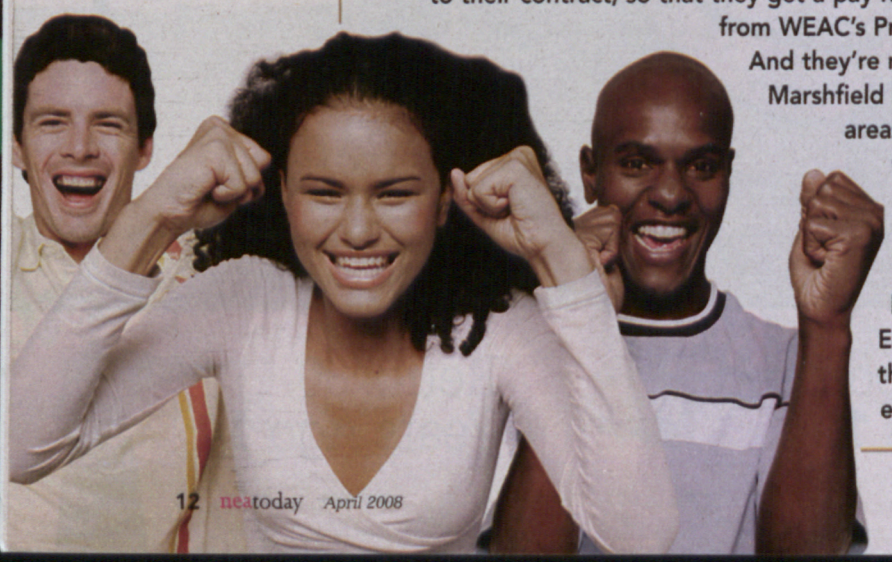
Not so in Ashley's class, where "reality-checking" what students see on TV is part of the fun. "They learn how TV shows can get the science wrong," she says, "and they also know that not all forensic scientists are as glamorous as they appear on television."

MERIT PAY for ESPs?

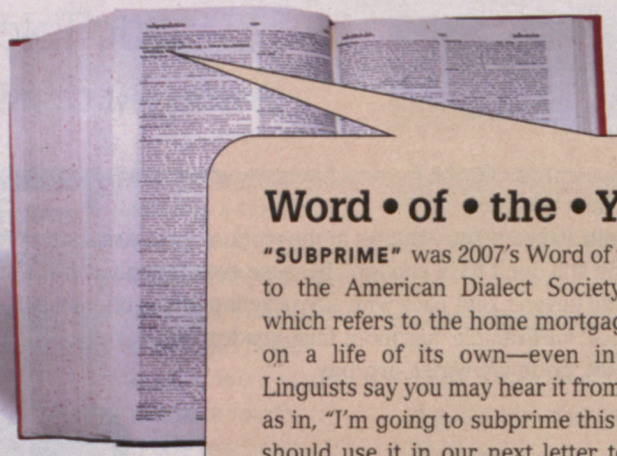
Even as teachers struggle with an increasing load of legislators, school board members, presidential candidates and others hoping to link their pay to test scores, some education support professionals (ESPs) in Wisconsin have figured out a sensible way to get a decent raise—and also learn more about doing their job.

Late last year, the Manitowoc Education Paraprofessionals bargained a change to their contract, so that they get a pay raise when they earn an ESP certificate from WEAC's Professional Development Academy (PDA). And they're not the first. Their colleagues in Marshfield have done the same, while others, in areas such as Kenosha and Milwaukee, have won one-time incentives.

"Many of us have been taking PDA courses for years so we may become more efficient in our jobs," says Deb Holschbach, vice president of Manitowoc Education Paraprofessionals. "It's great that the PDA is finally being acknowledged."



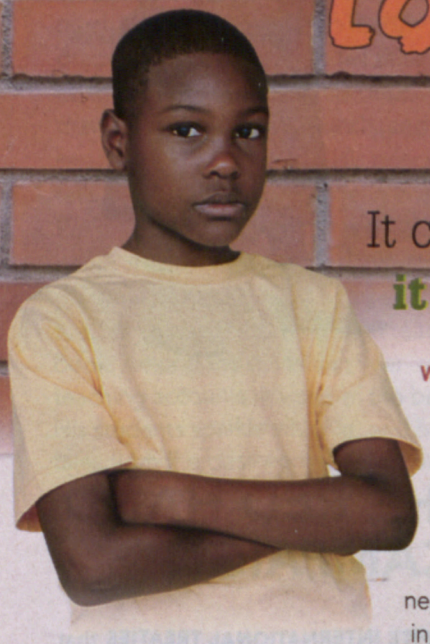
SPLATTER: C SALISBURY; CHEERING GROUP: BYRON KEULEMANS



Word • of • the • Year

"SUBPRIME" was 2007's Word of the Year, according to the American Dialect Society. Now the word, which refers to the home mortgage crisis, has taken on a life of its own—even in your classroom. Linguists say you may hear it from worried students, as in, "I'm going to subprime this test!" (Perhaps we should use it in our next letter to Congress, as in: "Don't subprime education funding!")

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION



It changes more than the rent, **it affects learning,** too.

WE ALL KNOW poor children do worse, on average, in school. Countless studies tell us so. But a new study suggests the problem isn't just poverty—it's where poverty forces these children to live.

Poor neighborhoods are frequently violent, racially and ethnically segregated, with few "good" schools or safe places to play, and the place itself has a negative effect on ability, according to a study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.*

Researchers looked at more than 2,000 Black children in Chicago, testing them over seven years, and found that kids from economically depressed neighborhoods did worse on verbal and cognitive tests than those from more affluent neighborhoods—even if the children had the same family income. The difference, after two years, was about four IQ points or a whole year in school.

Part of the problem, researchers said, is that parents in poor neighborhoods tend to "hunker down" at home, not venturing out much out of fear. Their children don't get exposed to as many verbal encounters and good communication models.

> capitol report

A GOOD IDEA

Since 1975, the federal government hasn't come close to paying its fair share of the costs of special education. Its contribution has hovered around 17 percent, leaving state and local school districts struggling to cover the difference. Just getting to 20 percent would mean full funding for an additional 1 million students—but the President's proposed budget doesn't come close. To get there, NEA is working with an "IDEA Full Funding Coalition," whose members include the American Federation of Teachers, the National PTA, and the Council of Great City Schools.

SAY NO TO HATE

NEA lobbyists also are working toward national hate crime prevention legislation and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. The latter was passed by the U.S. House last year and may be heard by the Senate this year. For information and updates, go to www.nea.org/lac.

Want to share a story?

By mail: *NEA Today*
1201 16th St., N.W.,
Washington, DC 20036

By e-mail: neatoday@nea.org

BRICK WALL: MLADEN DJORDJEVIC; YOUNG BOY: STOCKBYTE;
PHOTO COLLAGE: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.; DICTIONARY: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.

Where's it all go?

EDUCATORS EARN MUCH MORE money now than they did 30 years ago—thanks to the work of local Association leaders at the bargaining table. Hooray! So why do you feel like you still don't have enough? Because even though average salaries have grown—they've more than tripled since 1979—they still haven't kept pace with skyrocketing prices on housing and energy, according to NEA research. The average home price, for example, has more than quadrupled. For more information, including state-by-state details from NEA's new salary report, go to **www.nea.org/pay**.

2006–07

Average teacher salary:
$52,842

The cost of a first-class stamp:
39 cents

Average cost of a gallon of gas:
$2.59

Median sales price for homes:
$305,900

Average cost of a dozen eggs:
$1.44

Average cost of a gallon of milk:
$3.90

1979–80

Average teacher salary:
$16,715

The cost of a first-class stamp:
15 cents

Average cost of a gallon of gas:
86 cents

Median sales price for homes:
$71,800

Average cost of a dozen eggs:
85 cents

Average cost of a gallon of milk:
$2.10

SOURCES: NEA RESEARCH, ENERGY INFORMATION ASSOCIATION, THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR STATISTICS.

38

The **PERCENTAGE** of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students who experience physical **HARASSMENT** at school on the basis of their sexual orientation.

SOURCE: THE GAY, LESBIAN AND STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK

THE RED HAND CAMPAIGN

DESPITE INTERNATIONAL TREATIES that forbid the use of children in war, the United Nations estimates that 250,000 children still are forced to fight as soldiers. The Red Hand Campaign, which NEA supports, wants the U.N. to enforce the existing treaty. The aim is to deliver one million red hands—handprints in red paint—to the U.N. next year. For more information, go to **www.redhandday.org**.

2007 WOMAN: RON KRISEL; 1980 WOMAN: PHOTOLINK

Book Focus

THROWN TO THE WOLVES

Normally, we might not like a teacher who breaks through the blackboard with an angry fist. But when Dan Brown does it, in his rookie year as a fourth-grade teacher in the Bronx, our hearts sink. Who could blame him for losing control? He has no experience—either academic or on-the-job, no support from administration, and little access to a mentor or experienced peers. Brown writes of his time as a teacher in 2003 through the New York City Teaching Fellows program in *The Great Expectations School* (Arcade Publishing). He has plenty of optimism, drive, and smarts, but that ain't worth much when he's faced with fourth-graders who can't read or tell time; who lie to his face; steal from his desk drawers; and kick, slap, punch, and swear at their classmates. His principal tells him to work on his bulletin boards. We'd like to tell her to get real—this guy needs a formal, well-funded induction program. Anybody wondering about teacher retention issues should read this book. Among the many first-year teaching accounts, it's one of the best. His students sparkle with life, and his tales from the classroom shimmer with real-life stress and inspiration.

Q&A

Will Steger

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ARCTIC EXPLORER

This month, renowned explorer Will Steger leads a team of young adventurers to the Arctic to record the climate changes already taking place. Check out dramatic videos and photos from their dogsled journey and download a curriculum at www.nea.org/ref?climatechange.

What first motivated you to raise awareness of global warming?
I've kept weather records since I was 8 years old and have always been attuned to climate patterns, but in 1988, we had a record warm summer... and then in 2002, buried on the eighth page in the paper, I saw a headline—part of the Larsen ice shelf had collapsed. It was like science fiction. It was shocking, and it was my call to action.

What's the most alarming change you've personally witnessed?
The loss of pack ice. It used to cover an area the size of the United States and Mexico. Now, it's half that. Rather than white ice reflecting back into the atmosphere, we have miles and miles of dark ocean absorbing heat. Being on the ground and actually seeing it is pretty alarming. It's disrupting the heat balance of the globe.

What is the goal of the Ellesmere Island expedition?
To bring young people to the front lines of global warming, to send back dispatches so that students can be eyewitnesses to the changes happening now. We want to draw them in through the adventure, and inspire them to take action, to use their online social networks to organize, and to change the world in a positive way for the Earth.

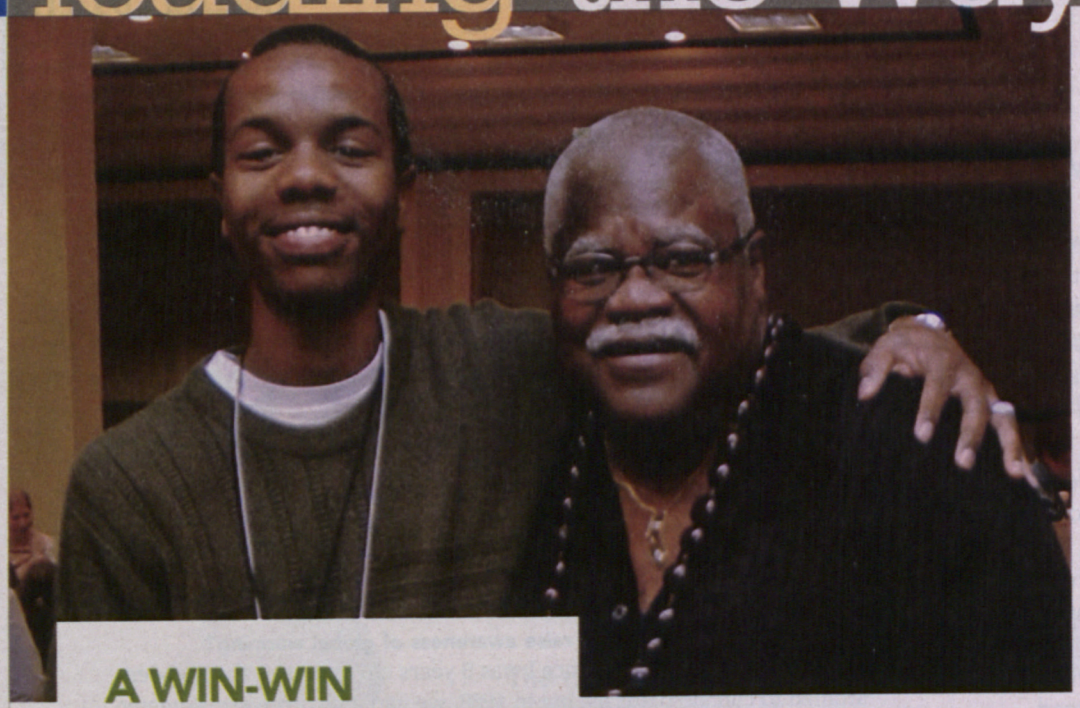
What can educators do?
As educators, we are responsible for preparing young people for what's coming with global warming. Young people are the ones who will inherit this problem and have to adapt. We need to bring out their curiosity, add the content, provide wisdom, and get them on the right track toward creating a clean environment and a secure world.

"To some of you, this is spare change. To us, it's our livelihood."

—WISCONSIN EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL MAUREEN SOCHA, SPEAKING TO WAUSAU SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS ABOUT A LIVING WAGE, WHILE HOLDING A CLEAR PLASTIC BAG WITH COINS.

Q/A PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE WILL STEGER FOUNDATION

leading the way



A WIN-WIN PARTNERSHIP

BY TIM WALKER

One of the most pressing issues facing the nation's schools—though often ignored in the national conversation over education reform—is the shortage of qualified teachers in disadvantaged communities. Staffing problems in these communities are due primarily to a "revolving door," where many teachers don't go on to complete their certification, lack opportunities for professional development, and end up leaving the teaching profession completely.

In February 2008, NEA President Reg Weaver and Tom Joyner, the nationally syndicated radio personality and philanthropist, announced the renewal of a joint effort to reverse this trend. Joyner and the NEA will distribute a new $1.1 million grant to boost the number of fully certified teachers in minority and hard-to-staff schools across the country. The initiative is a continuation of the Tom Joyner Foundation-National Education Association Teacher Licensure Scholarship Program, which began in 2005 with a $700,000 grant.

Weaver credits the partnership with moving the "teacher testing gap" to the forefront of educational issues. Furthermore, he says, creating a more diverse teaching force advances significant educational goals—preparing students for the workplace they will encounter, and making sure students of both genders and all racial and ethnic backgrounds are taught by people they can identify with.

"As public schools in the U.S. become more ethnically diverse, the teacher population becomes less diverse," said Weaver. "For minorities, one of the greatest barriers to earning a teaching license is the requirement to pass a state teacher licensure test."

The Tom Joyner Foundation was founded in 1998 and has raised more than $55 million and helped some 80 colleges and thousands of deserving students who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Joyner welcomes the expansion of his foundation's partnership with NEA.

"What we're trying to do," said Joyner, "is to make sure there are plenty of minority teachers out there. This partnership with NEA is a big step in making a difference in these teachers' lives, and the lives of the children they teach."

More than 60 percent of the minority teachers in this country are educated at HBCUs. The scholarship targets these institutions in selected areas and provides hundreds of educators with the proper technical support, workshops, professional development, and resources to help them pass state licensing examinations. The first phase of the scholarship program served hundreds of educators; the expansion is projected to assist more than 1,000 teachers in obtaining their licenses.

The scholarship program will continue on the campuses of Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, Clark Atlanta University in Georgia, Harris-Stowe State University in Missouri, and Johnson C. Smith University in North Carolina. The expansion brings six new HBCUs into the mix: Alabama A&M University, Howard University in Washington, D.C., LeMoyne-Owen College in Tennessee, Mississippi Valley State University, Norfolk State University in Virginia, and Prairie View A&M University in Texas.

To earn a scholarship, candidates must commit to teach for a minimum of three years in identified low-income communities. They must be currently employed as a teacher in a K–12 public school or currently enrolled in an accredited school of education to be eligible for participation. The program is committed to assisting those teachers who are not fully licensed by the state in the subject area and grade that they teach because they have failed to pass a state licensure exam.

"Until now, no national organizations have put a plan into action to deal with this issue," said Weaver. "Fortunately, the Foundation had the foresight to address this critical need in teacher preparation. NEA is inspired and grateful to be a part of this venture. By investing in our teachers, the Foundation will help us create great public schools for every child."

TEACHERS CAN ACCESS SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS FOR THE PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS FROM WWW.BLACKAMERICAWEB.COM/SITE.ASPX/FOUNDATION/NEA.

PHOTO: PATRICIA MCDONNELL/NEA

THE WHOLE WORLD (WIDE WEB) IS WATCHING

Cautionary tales from the 'what-were-you-thinking' department.

Way back in 1974, California teacher and aspiring actor Lou Zivkovich famously was fired for posing nude in *Playgirl* magazine. His response, as reported by *Newsweek*, "I didn't murder anyone."

Nowadays, thanks to advances in technology, you don't even need a major publisher to get fired; just post your racy photos, sexually graphic writings, or wild party stories on a personal Web blog. You'll be amazed by how quickly tech-savvy students can disseminate your postings to their friends and your employer.

Here's a roundup of just some of the horror stories from last year:

IN VIRGINIA, high school art teacher Stephen Murmer was fired after posting photos of his "butt art" on the Web, which were viewed by scores of students. The budding artist applied paint to his posterior and genitalia, which he then pressed onto canvases. With the help of the ACLU, he sued the school district last fall claiming a violation of his First Amendment rights.

BAND DIRECTOR Scott Davis from Broward County, Florida, was dismissed after school officials viewed his MySpace profile that included his musings about sex, drugs, and depression.

A COLORADO ENGLISH teacher lost her job after composing and posting sexually explicit poetry on her MySpace site. Police were even called in to investigate.

NASHVILLE TEACHER Margaret Thompson was removed from teaching after posting "racy pictures" of herself, along with candid photos of her students, on her MySpace profile.

FLORIDA MIDDLE school teacher John Bush was terminated because of "offensive" and "unacceptable " photos and information on his MySpace page.

MASSACHUSETTS TEACHER Keath Driscoll was suspended for his MySpace postings including "sexually suggestive" photographs, videos of drinking alcohol, and references to women as "whores."

BUT THE CLUELESS AWARD goes to Atlanta-area high school football coach Donald Shockley, who was forced to resign last January for storing on his school computer photos of his assistant principal dressed in lingerie and posing in sexually suggestive ways. The photos were discovered by a student whom Shockley had asked to work on his computer and who then posted the photos on the Internet and sent them to other students at the school.

Last October, reporters for *The Columbus Dispatch* conducted an investigation of MySpace profiles posted by Ohio teachers. The newspaper quoted one 25-year-old teacher bragging that she's "an aggressive freak in bed," "sexy," and "an outstanding kisser." Another teacher wrote on her page that she had recently "gotten drunk," "taken drugs," and "gone skinny-dipping."

In the wake of these reports, the Ohio Education Association urged all OEA members to remove any personal profiles they may have posted on MySpace or Facebook. The Association also warned members that such profiles "can be used as evidence in disciplinary proceedings," which could "affect not only a teacher's current job but his/her teaching license" as well.

But what about free speech? Don't school employees have the right, on their own time, to blog about their private lives without fear of losing their jobs? Probably not.

While the courts have not yet decided any of these teacher blogging cases, it's the general rule that school employees can be disciplined for off-duty conduct if the school district can show that the conduct had an adverse impact on the school or the teacher's ability to teach. And it wouldn't be too difficult to make that showing if the teacher's blog includes sexually explicit or other inappropriate content and is widely viewed by students.

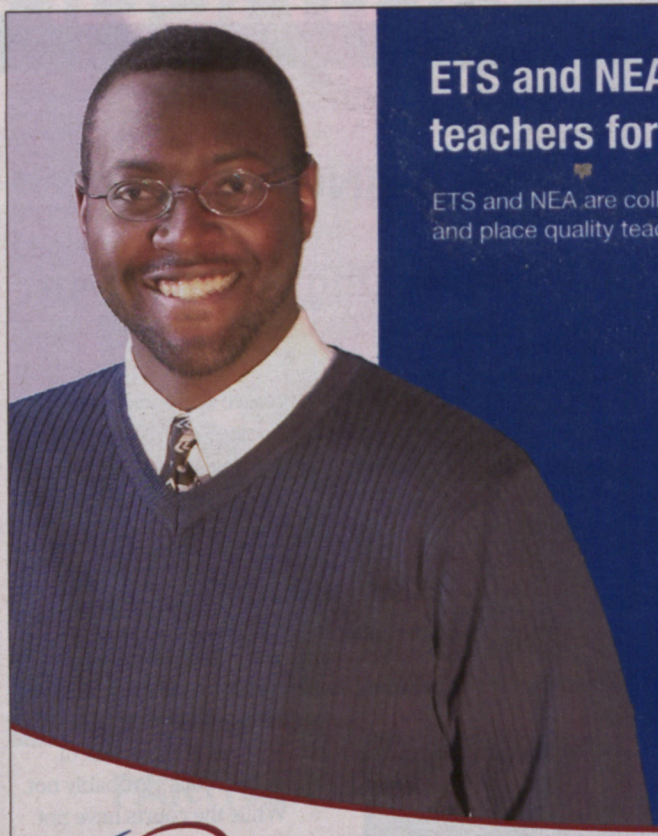
As to a possible free speech claim, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2004 that it was not a violation of the First Amendment for the City of San Diego to fire a police officer for posting a sexually explicit video of himself on the Internet. The unanimous Court said that such speech was "detrimental to the mission and functions of the employer."

There's an old lawyer's saw that goes something like this: Never put in writing anything that you wouldn't want read in open court or by your mother.

Maybe it's time for an updated adage: Never put in electronic form anything that you wouldn't want viewed by a million people, including your colleagues, students, and supervisors—and your mother.

—MICHAEL D. SIMPSON
NEA OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL

PHOTO: SUPERSTOCK



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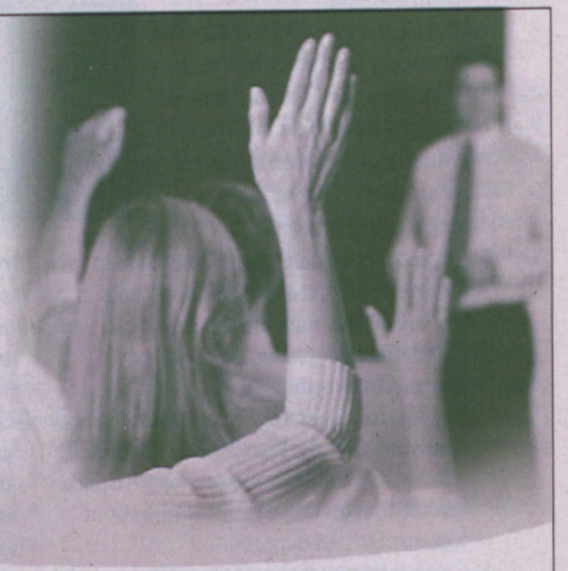

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DRIVING FORCES

New Jersey bus drivers learn counter-terrorism techniques.

BY JOHN ROSALES

The irate father forced his way onto Kathy Reilly's packed school bus, intending to kidnap the daughter he had just lost in a bitter custody battle. He was in a rage, screaming and pounding the dashboard and windows with his fists.

He told Reilly he had a knife under his coat and would stab her if she did not follow his demands.

"I believed him," Reilly says. "He was in my face."

Fortunately, he did not really have a knife. And he wasn't really a crazed dad. He was a police officer playing a role to teach Reilly and 115 other bus drivers and school officials with the New Jersey Gloucester Township Public School System how to handle violent attacks on the road.

"The key is to stay calm," Reilly says. "You're by yourself on the road with the kids, but you have a lot of support on the other end of the radio."

The one-day class held last January was part of a training exercise to create stronger school security policies and practices in New Jersey.

Kathy Reilly participated in a simulation of a bus hijacking as part of a training exercise in counter-terrorism. "If I don't know you, you're not getting on my bus," she says.

> "The training opened everyone's eyes to how vulnerable buses are."
>
> —George Bittner

After seeing an extensive training exercise in school safety at the 2006 New Jersey Education Association's (NJEA) annual conference, George Bittner, Gloucester's supervisor of transportation services, and bus driver Bonnie Chalfant, president of Gloucester Township Support Professionals, started discussing ways to train Gloucester drivers in counter-terrorism and school bus takeovers.

"Buses are soft targets," says Bittner. "The training opened everyone's eyes to how vulnerable buses are, but also to what we can do to prevent bad situations."

Eventually, NJEA, New Jersey's Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP), and local law enforcement agencies were invited to develop a workshop for bus drivers.

Bittner says a strong working relationship between school boards, local police and fire departments, and the OHSP is vital to school as well as bus safety. He adds that it was his own working relationship with the Gloucester police chief that led to 14 SWAT team officers attending the training. They answered questions and demonstrated emergency response techniques.

Bittner worked with OHSP personnel on the indoor classroom presentation outlining security measures on the bus, at bus stops, and in the storage yard.

"We love to have parents at the bus stops watching the kids," Bittner says. "But they are not allowed on board. It's illegal. As soon as a driver sees a trespasser's foot on the bus, we want them to know how to react quickly and appropriately."

Chalfant worked with Police Sergeant Jason Gittens in securing four buses and planning the takeover scenarios. For the role-play, four participants were chosen from the group to drive four buses. The rest of the participants sat on the buses portraying students.

In her eight years as a bus driver, Reilly has encountered her share of confrontational adults. They have cursed at her in front of students, cut her off in traffic, and shown her their middle finger.

But the training tackled more than just rude adults. Reilly, who drives a 36-foot bus, often at capacity (54 passengers), also learned that someone who might target a bus may start by monitoring her bus route and seeking information about her job.

"They might ask questions about where we park our buses," she says.

To trick drivers into talking, instructors said terrorist planners might impersonate an officer using illegal law enforcement or military uniforms.

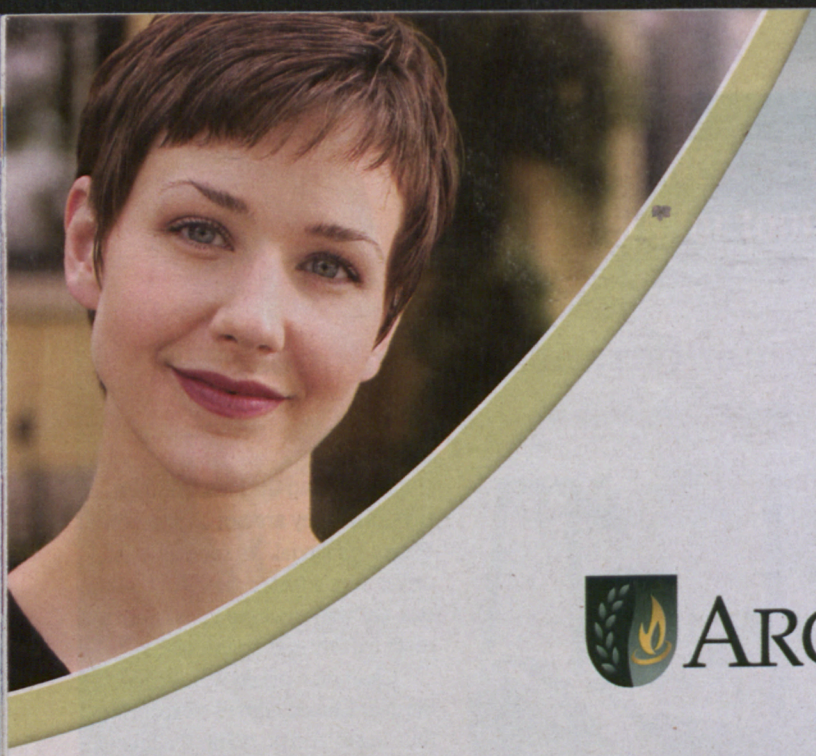
In 2006, New Jersey established the School Security Task Force to deal with such situations as bomb threats, shooters on campus, lockdowns, evacuations, and the takeover of a school bus.

"A terrorist could be anyone," Reilly says. "If you have any problems on the road, with the right system in place, you call base. Help will be on the way in minutes."

Training aside, Reilly has one Golden Rule regarding bus safety that she has stood by since her first day on the job.

"If I don't know you, you're not getting on my bus," she says.

PHOTO: PATRICK RUMAKER



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WHY THEY LEAVE

LACK OF RESPECT, NCLB, AND UNDERFUNDING—IN A TOPSY-TURVY PROFESSION, WHAT CAN MAKE TODAY'S TEACHERS STAY?

BY CYNTHIA KOPKOWSKI

One afternoon, the public address system at Janet Griggs' school—where administrators have done away with paper memos—crackles with the announcement that staff heading to impending team meetings should refer to the room assignments listed in the e-mail they received that day.

Confused teachers wander the halls confirming with one another that nobody got the e-mail. The PA system stirs to life again, informing teachers that administrators just realized they never sent it. The disembodied voice then starts giving instructions about the meetings, sending teachers scrambling for paper to write it all down. Administrators later send the e-mail after most of the meetings have adjourned.

If it were a *Dilbert* comic strip, readers would chuckle. But when what's at stake is the professionalism of educators like Griggs, a 61-year-old communication arts teacher in St. Louis, Missouri, and the quality of instruction for the children they want so desperately to teach, well, it's no laughing matter. Yet every day, workplace conditions are sometimes so surreal they make leaving the profession seem like their best or only option.

Nationally, the average turnover for all teachers is 17 percent, and in urban school districts specifically, the number jumps to 20 percent, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future proffers starker numbers, estimating that one-third of all new teachers leave after three years, and 46 percent are gone within five years.

Their departure through what researchers call the "revolving door" that's spinning ever faster—the commission estimates teacher attrition has grown by 50 percent over the past 15 years—costs roughly $7 billion a year, as districts and states recruit, hire, and try to retain new teachers. "There is this idea that we can solve the teaching shortage with recruitment," says commission President Tom Carroll. "What we have is a retention crisis." Likening it to continually dumping sand into a bucket with holes in the bottom, Carroll says, "as fast as [the districts] are moving teachers into schools, they're leaving."

Marta Nielson, an elementary school teacher in Vista, California, is leaving. Her current classroom is packed with up to 38 students. There are no aides and the obsessive focus on cramming for standardized tests means "an atmosphere of constant stress and fear," she says. The result? She's leaving at the end of the year for a small private school.

While Baby Boomer retirement is a factor in the

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BARTH; ILLUSTRATION: GROFF CREATIVE, INC

Janet Griggs

current turnover rates, it is dwarfed by those leaving for troubling reasons like Nielson's. Take the U.S. Department of Education's 2005 examination of departures. Thirty percent of teachers left in 2003–04 because of retirement, but 56 percent left citing job dissatisfaction and a desire to find an entirely new career.

"The whole retirement thing has been consistently exaggerated," says University of Pennsylvania researcher Richard Ingersoll. Policymakers and administrators blame retirement in a case of "wrong diagnosis and wrong prescription," he says. "You can't do a whole lot about retirement, but you can do something about the way schools are organized, operated, and managed."

What is it about the day-to-day experiences of teachers that has so many heading for the door each year? Researchers across the country devoted much time during the past two years polling the group they call "the leavers." Last year's report from the National Center for Education Statistics outlined a series of reasons why that group is swelling, based on interviews with more than 7,000 current and former teachers. Some states have conducted their own polling of tens of thousands of members.

What they're hearing from educators is at times surprising and disheartening, but it's also spurring efforts to improve the system.

NCLB mandates

YOU MEAN YOU DIDN'T SIGN ON TO TEACH BUBBLE-FILLING?

State standardized testing preparation is in full swing for Griggs and her colleagues. An administrator sends an e-mail late one day demanding that the seventh-grade teachers immediately respond to her with a list of their "power standards." Griggs stares at the computer screen. She doesn't have a clue what a "power standard" is or how it's going to help her students. She turns off the computer and heads home for the night.

It's one thing to have to labor daily under the weight of testing and unfunded accountability standards wrought by the so-called No Child Left Behind law (NCLB). It's another to know that they spell the end of your teaching career.

Elizabeth (whose name has been changed to protect her identity), a young elementary special education teacher in New Jersey, knows that she will leave the profession because of what she sees as the unfair demands placed on her by the law. Her classroom is increasingly loaded with students and the benchmarks for those students are creeping up senselessly. "They are in special education for a reason," she says. There will always be children who perform below others on standardized tests, but under the current accountability mandates, their teachers "are looked at like we're not doing a good job, even if we've been doing good work with them," she says. "I say to myself more and more often that I don't know how much longer I can do this." Last fall, she sat down with her fiancé, reviewed their financial plans, and came up with an answer: not more than five years at the current rate of pay.

It's not just test scores. After NCLB was enacted, Arizona schools sent home letters with all students in classes taught by those suddenly derided for not being "highly qualified" under the law. "It was one of the most demoralizing incidents we've seen," says Arizona Education Association President John Wright, who fielded calls from teachers in tears afterward. "The pressure to meet these unrealistic testing expectations breaks down teacher morale, and in too many communities, parents and leaders are not affording teachers professional respect."

Fallout from the accountability movement will naturally affect retention rates, says Penn researcher Ingersoll. "We want to increase accountability, and there's nothing wrong with that, but it doesn't make sense to hold people accountable for things over which they have no control," (like students' disadvantages before they even walk through the classroom door) he says. "Management 101 says you're going to drive out the best if you do that."

NEA's fight on the front lines

Overhauling NCLB is a top priority for NEA, which believes that a massive infusion of federal money is needed to create smaller classes and bolster proven, beneficial strategies for school reform. High-stakes testing and punishment for low scores are not what's needed.

NEA continues to aggressively lobby Congress for fundamental changes to the law, spreading the word through the media and coalition partnerships, all the while continuing to get feedback from state and local leaders on what the federal role in education should be. (Which, as you know best, isn't necessarily what it is now!)

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT NEA'S EFFORTS, AND TO HELP, VISIT THE LEGISLATIVE ACTION CENTER AT WWW.NEA.ORG/LAC.

Too little support

THERE'S YOUR CLASSROOM, BEST OF LUCK

It's one of the harsh paradoxes of teaching: the schools least prepared to support new teachers—that is, low-income, low-performing facilities—are the ones where most new teachers are sent. When they arrive, they often encounter an isolated, every-one-for-themselves system vastly different from the collaborative school of education or student teaching environment they just left.

When Boomers arrived full of independent spirit decades ago, they "went into the classroom, closed the door, and figured it out," says Mary Ann Jandoli, associate director of Research and Economic Services for the New Jersey Education Association. Earlier generations might not realize that many Millennials now entering the workforce are "more team- and process-oriented."

PHOTOS LEFT: CHRISTIAN GOODEN; RIGHT: TOM GILBERT; ILLUSTRATIONS: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.

So many teachers say they crave a connection to their peers. But while "there's a lot of talk about creating collaborative learning, it isn't the norm," says Jandoli. Many states offer some form of mentoring for brand new teachers—the number of first-year teachers getting such support doubled during the last 10 years—but there's a broad range from an involved, routine presence to a sporadic visitor. (And in New Jersey, unless their district is picking up the tab, new teachers must shell out $1,000 to the state to get a mentor.)

All these factors are confronting a generation of young employees who don't view jobs with the permanence that their parents did. They'll move within districts or states looking for a position that suits them, says Jandoli, and if they don't find one they like, they'll leave altogether.

Departures are particularly acute at those high-needs schools. As a result, "there's no professional continuity, parents don't know the teachers, and the teachers don't even know each other," Carroll says. "The sink-or-swim placement of new teachers in the most challenging schools and classrooms is unacceptable, and it has to end."

New Jersey's life preserver

Not surprisingly, researchers credit the comprehensiveness and quality of the induction and mentoring programs in states reporting higher teacher retention rates, even when controlling for the income level of schools. Most beneficial are programs bundling mentoring by someone in the same teaching field with group planning and collaborative activities.

In New Jersey's Gloucester Township, union leaders working with district administrators instituted a program several years ago called Support On Site (SOS) that has since rolled out statewide. Regular meetings allow new teachers to hang out and talk about the obstacles facing them in the classroom. They meet with mentors who offer advice and share their experiences in an informal and confidential setting. In addition to addressing new members' immediate needs, the program also seeks to groom future teacher leaders. "We're trying to create a role in which the Association can help ground new teachers this way," says Jandoli. "If we don't, we're going to lose our future leaders."

Student discipline

THEY'RE YOUR PROBLEM

While many of the students in Tammy McCartney's Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, middle school classroom were attentive, more than a handful preferred to horseplay and wander the room. Administrators signed off on her plan to place troublesome students at an isolated desk in the corner, but that became a pipe dream in a room so crammed with students that one needed to turn sideways to walk the aisles. Administrators discouraged sending students to the office. When one absolutely needed to be sent, the teacher had to first stop and fill out a referral form, and even then the student was usually sent right back to the classroom, his or her behavior unchanged.

Compounding the problem were phone calls to parents that yielded indifference or blatant animosity. McCartney's breaking point came the day that a boy put a sweatshirt on as a pair of pants and waddled around the classroom, creating havoc. When she called his house, his mother said he must have just been cold, and hung up. "I said, 'I think I've had enough,'" McCartney, 29, says. She quit last spring.

Unmanageable discipline problems mean more than a headache in the classroom. For teachers like McCartney, they erode desire to invest time and energy in lesson plans that make the content come alive for students. Preservice training is often of little help,

Tammy McCartney

too. "We spent very little, if any, time on discipline," McCartney says of the training she received the summer before entering the classroom. "I entered the profession completely unprepared for discipline problems."

Deciding to leave devastated McCartney, a once optimistic and enthusiastic young teacher. "Gosh, it was a really big defeat," she says, letting out a deep breath. "Teaching is important, but I got to the point where I wasn't willing to sacrifice so much anymore."

Resources you can use today

Head to www.nea.org/neatodayextra/discipline.html for Teacher TV video clips of colleagues handling students who talk too much and work too little; sample classroom rules for elementary, middle, and high school students; a checklist of classroom disciplinary procedures; excerpts from NEA Professional Library books on discipline; and quick tips on dealing with clowns, tattletales, and kids who can't sit still.

Underfunded and Underpaid

FOLLOW THE MONEY...AND YOU'LL FIND A LACK OF RESPECT

A district administrator has decreed that worksheets, like memos, are verboten at Griggs' school. When she absolutely has to have materials copied for the classroom, she is required to give them to a secretary with a request form. That form is sent to a principal for approval. If it's approved and the teacher doesn't need more than 100 copies, they are made. If she needs more than 100 copies, the print job is sent out of the building to the district copy center and then shipped back to the school.

When Sherry Mann started teaching fifth grade this year in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, the 39-year-old career changer was floored by how often she found herself reaching into her own pocket to pay for classroom supplies. "My husband is a software developer. He would never have to purchase his own paper." Thus far, she estimates she's spent roughly $1,000 on classroom essentials. (She's not alone. About 8 percent of teachers spend that annually and the average teacher spends at least $433, according to a 2003 NEA Research study. And education support professionals spend about $168, according to a 2007 NEA Research report.

Feeling that she doesn't have all the tools or the time she needs to do her job the way the self-confessed "perfectionist" would like weighs on Mann. "It's really depressing sometimes. You get to the point where you just can't handle it."

The issue of inadequate pay arises when educators like Mann, battered by a slew of such obstacles, grow increasingly dissatisfied. They begin to look around, says Susan Moore Johnson, a researcher with the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "Other lines of work offer higher pay, and when there's not such a stigma attached to leaving one job and going to another, the pay elsewhere becomes more attractive." Elizabeth, the young New Jersey teacher, puts it this way: "You see your friends coming out of college getting jobs making the same or more than you do for less work, and it's tempting to go find a job that pays more and is more relaxing."

The bottom line for many educators, especially new ones, is that their income doesn't pay the rent and bills. "Teachers have to be able to afford to teach," says Johnson, "Even for the most committed, the pay has to be sufficient to live a reasonable, middle class life."

Figuring out how to tackle pay problems has proven tricky in states where officials have focused largely on bonuses to woo new teachers. South Carolina offered an $18,000 bonus for teachers to come to its weakest schools, but because of a lack of administrative support, poor working conditions, and inadequate induction and mentoring, only 20 percent of the teachers sought took the bonuses and stuck it out. In Massachusetts, a $20,000 signing bonus program failed for similar reasons. When recipients figured out what they'd actually net in bonus money over the program's four-year term, they often decided it wasn't worth it, says Johnson.

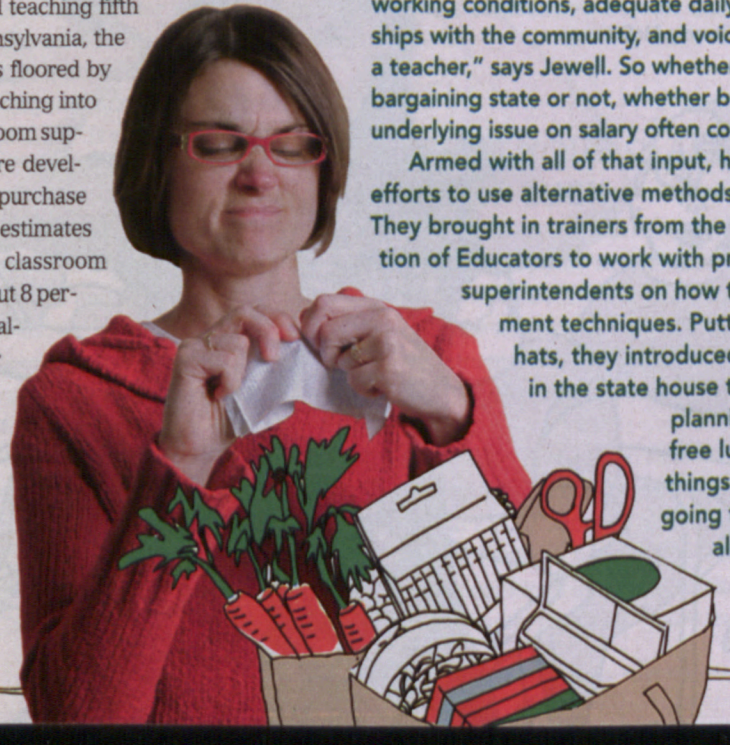
Bonuses are not the answer to pay problems. That's why one goal of NEA's national Salary Campaign (www.nea.org/pay) is a $40,000 starting salary for every preK–12 teacher.

North Carolina's training

"Bonuses may get teachers to come to hard-to-staff schools, but it's not going to keep them," says Mark Jewell, president of the Guilford County Association of Educators. "It's the working conditions, adequate daily planning time, partnerships with the community, and voice in leadership that keep a teacher," says Jewell. So whether you're in a collective bargaining state or not, whether bonuses loom or not, the underlying issue on salary often comes down to respect.

Armed with all of that input, his team redoubled their efforts to use alternative methods in the retention fight. They brought in trainers from the North Carolina Association of Educators to work with principals and district superintendents on how to improve their management techniques. Putting on their lobbying hats, they introduced two pieces of legislation in the state house that seek guaranteed planning time and daily duty-free lunch. "These are the things that say they're finally going to treat us as professionals," Jewell says.

And if you're a para-



Sherry Mann

professional or teacher who has classroom expenses, don't forget that you can deduct up to $250 on this year's taxes for books and classroom supplies. Write the deduction in on line 23 of your Form 1040. You don't even need to itemize your taxes to get the credit. NEA lobbyists (who got the $250 credit instituted in the first place) recently got that deduction extended through 2008. They're pushing legislation that would make it permanent and increase the amount to $400.

TO REGISTER YOUR OPINION WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS, GO TO WWW.NEA.ORG/LAC/EDTAX/INDEX.HTML.

Lack of influence and respect

EDUCATORS SHOULD BE SEEN AND NOT HEARD

As open house night approaches, Janet Griggs and her fellow teaching team members determine they should speak to parents as a group to better explain their interdependent strategy. An administrator arrives at a meeting where they're putting the finishing touches on this plan and tells them they must stay in their own classrooms during the open house to show off their rooms.

Instead of a dynamic presentation giving the educators a chance to demonstrate the scope of their work with the children, they end up meeting only for a few minutes with parents who wander through their rooms. When the event is over, Griggs sinks into her chair and wonders if anyone will ever listen to teachers' ideas.

In survey after survey, teachers say they want a sense that they are making progress in their career, that they can extend their knowledge and expertise beyond the walls of their own classroom, and that they are being valued, says Harvard's Johnson. "It can be very demoralizing if people believe the world thinks they are not smart and doesn't value their work." Yet that's the message reinforced daily for educators nationwide.

Ingersoll saw it happen himself, when he made the transition from teaching high school to becoming a college professor. "It was day to night," he says, laughing incredulously. "We have a societal image there that this is not worthy of the prestige of being a lawyer, doctor, or an engineer. That's going to make recruitment and retention difficult."

Even within the profession, educators all too often feel their expertise is discounted. Take Elizabeth. Working with her special education students, she realized the mandated reading program was ineffective. But she got nowhere when trying to explain that to administrators.

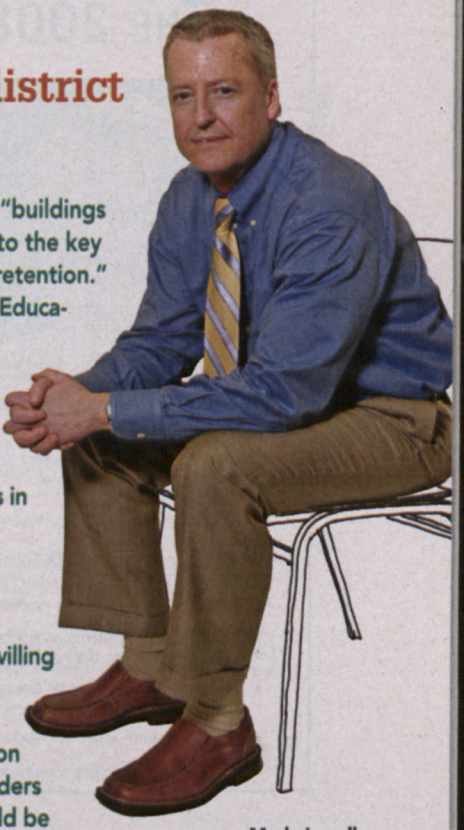
Whether the teachers arrived fresh from college or from another career, the problem is often the same when it comes to lack of influence, says Carroll of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. "After they've been teaching a few years, they don't see a rewarding career path ahead of them. The only way to advance is to leave and go into administration or just leave altogether."

Arizona's union-district collaboration

It's no surprise, Ingersoll says, that "buildings where teachers have more input into the key decisions have significantly better retention."

A partnership between Arizona Education Association (AEA) and district leaders was crucial to keeping marginalized educators from walking. After receiving a survey last year showing that at least 10 percent of his educators had exodus in mind, AEA President John Wright knew that there were awkward moments coming that couldn't be avoided. "The success stories are where we see schools and districts willing to work with the union to act on uncomfortable data," he says.

Staying local with the prescription was key. School and Association leaders developed concrete things that could be done to improve management in schools. One outcome: the realization that teachers needed and deserved to be more involved in the planning of curriculum strategy. Principals needed to better explain to teachers their own thoughts about the curriculum approach and garner reaction from their staff. "The process," Wright says, "is as important as the product."



Mark Jewell

READ ABOUT OTHER SUCCESSFUL UNION-DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS AT WWW.NEA.ORG/REF?WHYTHEYLEAVE.

AND WHAT OF JANET GRIGGS? WILL SHE MAKE IT ANOTHER YEAR?

Yes. "I'm determined that I will leave on my terms," says Griggs. "The reasons I will stay are, No. 1, money; No. 2, my wonderful coworkers; and No. 3, sheer stubbornness."

She worries though that the cumulative effect of all the bureaucracy, substandard working conditions, and NCLB mandates is too much for her newer counterparts to bear. "I don't know how long they can hang on," she says. "And that's what's scary. Who's going to teach our children when new teachers coming in are so quickly demoralized by the headaches and the pressures put on them?"

Griggs believes Association membership is integral to sticking it out. "I have seen that our local is very strong," she says. She advises fellow teachers that they can't afford not to be a union member. "The power of the numbers and the protection NEA offers is important," Griggs says. "I've seen all of these issues, but I've also seen how remaining a united voice can help us." nea

Send comments on this story to ckopkowski@nea.org.

PHOTOS LEFT: JOHN WHITEHEAD; RIGHT: SARA DAVIS; ILLUSTRATIONS: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.

The NEA Foundation Proudly Presents The 2008 Teaching Excellence Awardees

The NEA Foundation

Lynette Wayne
The NEA Member Benefits Award for Teaching Excellence
Education Minnesota
Christa McAuliffe Elementary, Hastings, MN

The Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence Recipients

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Louisiana Assn. of Educators
Carrie Martin Elementary
Plain Dealing, LA

Karen Ginty
New Jersey Education Assn.
Monmouth Beach Elementary
Monmouth Beach, NJ

Douglas R. Graney
Virginia Education Assn.
Herndon High School
Herndon, VA

Carole Darlene Moyer
Ohio Education Assn.
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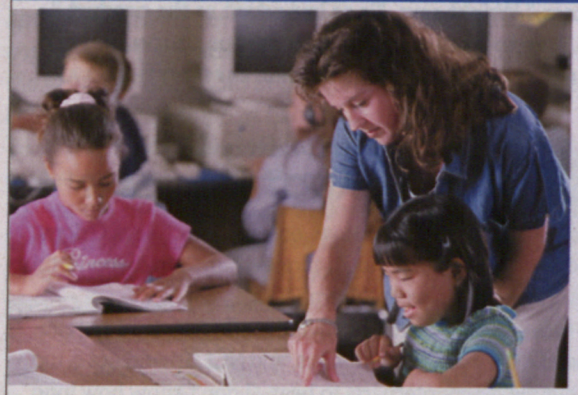

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AHNT 0408

In a Gangster's Paradise

How they're banging in the 'burbs

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY

You may not think you have gang members in your school. You may think that your students aren't those kinds of kids. Maybe you think they're too rich, too suburban, too smart, or too White.

Think again.

"If you don't think you have a gang problem, you're in the wrong business," says Detective Javier Castellanos, a New Jersey gang specialist, in a recent training for school staff in northern New Jersey.

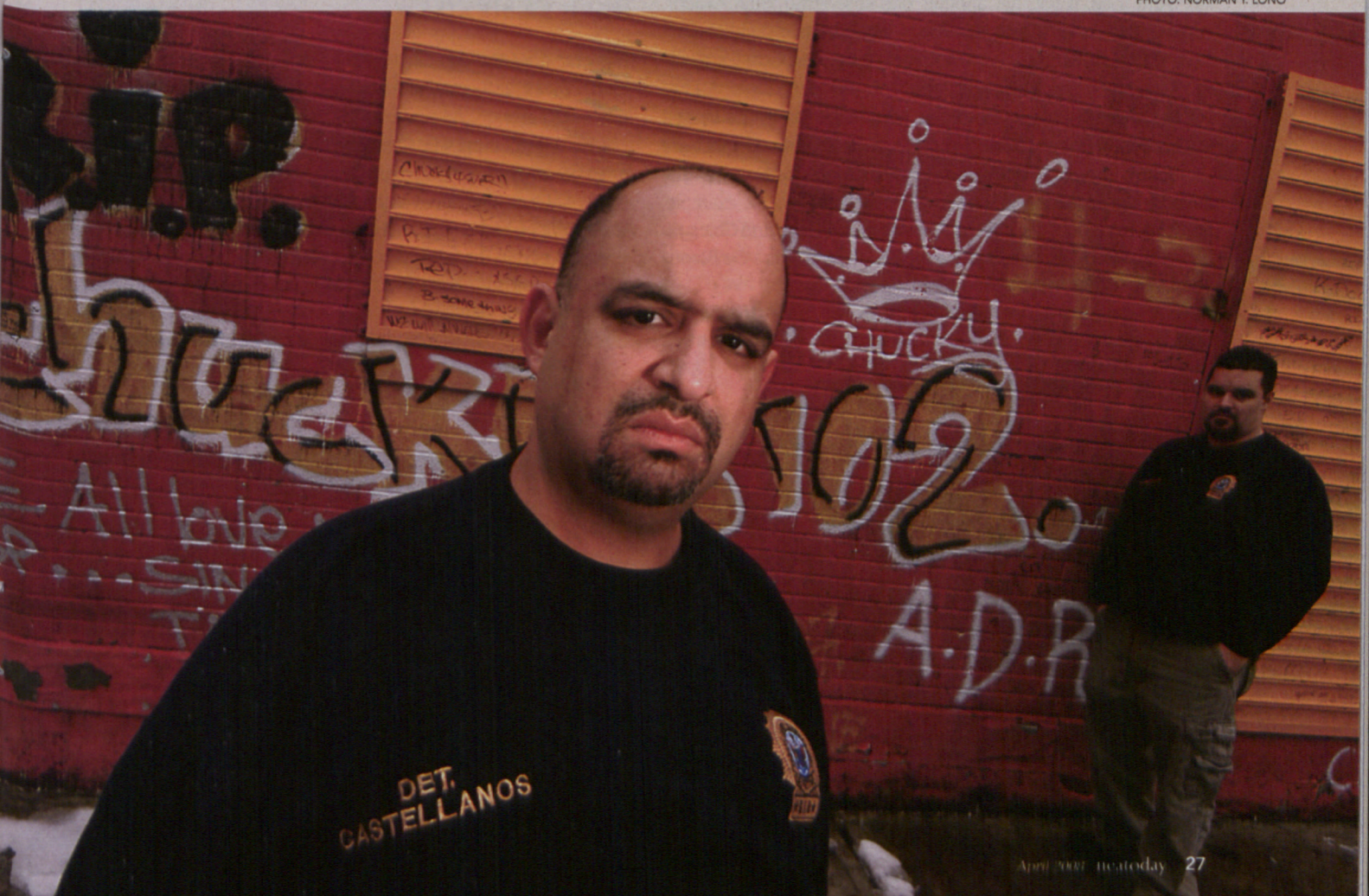
"You do," he adds firmly.

"We know it!" says a voice from the back.

For decades, gang membership in America has been stretching out from the inner cities of Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, into such places as small town Wisconsin. Past the gates in South Florida's cul-de-sac communities, into the big houses of Washington, D.C.'s, suburbs, even down the street from the Billy Graham Center in the most churched-up town in this country, you will find boys and girls in gangs. And that means you'll find them in your schools, too.

According to the most recent U.S. Justice Department surveys, somewhere around 760,000 kids are hanging, fighting, and pushing drugs in 24,000 different gangs. In 2000, 95 percent of law enforce-

PHOTO: NORMAN Y. LONO



ment respondents "identified [gang] activity within one or more of the high schools in their jurisdictions. Ninety-one percent reported gang activity within one or more intermediate schools."

Since then, according to the 2004 National Youth Gang Survey, about half of the surveyed agencies say things have gotten better or stayed the same, but the other half say it's even bloodier than before. At the same time, the federal data collectors say their numbers, which rely on reports from local police, may not provide an accurate accounting. Not surprisingly, not all want to admit they have a gang problem. It's not such a great thing for property values, notes Castellanos dryly.

And not all school districts want to admit it either.

"What constitutes a problem?" asks a suburban Connecticut high school teacher. "Our district has gangs—but we're in denial."

WHA'S CRAKKIN?

Castellanos and his partners in the Passaic County Sheriff's Department have perfected a Rambo-style, take-no-prisoners presentation on youth gangs that leaves at least one school nurse wiping tears off her cheek and a few veteran truant officers shaking their heads. "I've been in that kid's house," whispers one, as the detective clicks past a PowerPoint slide of a bullet-scarred teenager.

"You ever hear a kid go 'Bla-a-a-a-att!' like simulated gunfire, when he's walking into your classroom?" Castellanos asks.

"Oh my God. I hear that!"

"And then, if you get another one answering 'Suuu-wooo!' you'd better duck!" Castellanos says. The first is a popular East Coast Bloods greeting, while the latter is pure West Coast.

Ready for a history lesson?

Basically, there are two major gang alliances in the United States: Folk Nation and People Nation. Within those alliances are the actual gangs (in the same way that the American League includes the Yankees and Red Sox). The Folk Nation, for example, boasts of big names like the Los Angeles-based Crips and Chicago-based Gangster Disciples. Within the People Nation are the Bloods and Latin Kings.

Each gang has its own set of identifiers. Remember the big deal about bandannas in schools? You'd see a kid draped in red scarves, tied around their heads and legs, and know they belonged—or wanted to look like they belonged—to a chapter of Bloods. In response, many schools have banned them. But the kids have moved on. There are new ways to signal affiliation.

"You see a kid with a jacket hanging on their left shoulder—they're telling you they're Folk Nation, could be Crip," Castellanos warns. They might pull their left pocket out, roll up their left pant leg, or wear their belt buckle to the left. Regular baseball caps are very big. Why are all the kids in one New Jersey project wearing Pittsburgh Steelers caps? Because the team's colors also are Latin Kings colors. Why are other East Coast kids wearing Kansas City Chiefs caps?

Because "KC" means "Kill Crips."

Tattoos are telling, too. Don't believe the kid who tells you that his "MOB" tattoo means "man of business," or "money over bitches," Castellanos says. It means "member of Bloods." Or look for strands of colored beads, sometimes modified rosaries, which are popular among the most faithful gang members.

The other day, Castellanos, who has moved from New Jersey to a wooded suburb of Pennsylvania, ran into an obvious Bloods member in his local grocery store. "The salad dressing aisle!" he recalls with amazement. The street-wise officer flashed a few elaborate hand signals, shouted, "What's poppin', dawg?" and the gang member greeted him with delight: "You Blood?"

"Nah, man. I'm a cop."

KEEP YA HEAD UP

How far does the detective have to move his two daughters? Is there a nice little town where boys don't get "beat in" and girls don't get "sexed in"?

He doesn't think so. "Gangs go everywhere," he says. (He just got a photo of gang-related graffiti in Afghanistan.) His colleagues in law enforcement, all over the United States, see the same problems. "We've had gangs in Northern Virginia for some years, for the most part in the inner suburbs," says Leesburg, Virginia, Chief of Police Joe Price. "In the early parts of this decade, we saw it moving to the outer suburbs, which is happening all over the country."

Price is co-chair of a regional taskforce that involves everybody

TEST YOUR GANG IQ

Baseball Hats

Seeing lots of Michigan hats? It doesn't mean your students have suddenly embraced the Big Ten.

Clothing

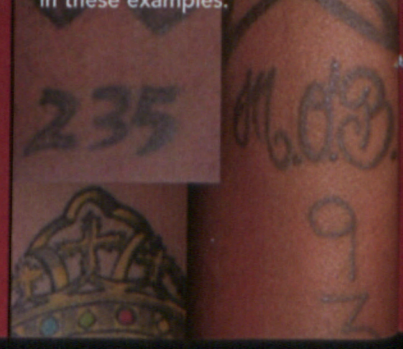
What's it mean if a kid walks your school's hallways with his left pants pocket turned inside out? A hint: He doesn't need lunch money.

Beads/Rosary

Why are so many school districts banning beads? The crackdown on rosaries isn't anti-Catholic bias, we swear.

Tattoos

Most tattoos have nothing to do with gangs, but some do. There are some obvious tell-tale signs in these examples.



from the Secret Service to the local school board—and it shares credit for reining in the rapid expansion of MS-13, a fast-growing, machete-wielding Central American gang. The task force also has trained every teacher in its region, much like the New Jersey team. (In New Jersey, teacher training in gang awareness is required by state law, and Castellanos is a regular guest at New Jersey Education Association-sponsored conferences.)

"One of the worst things that a community can do is put its head in the sand and say it doesn't have a problem," Price says. "Gangs will develop so rapidly that by the time they're forced to realize it, it's too late."

But all this red-button talk about gang-bangers in the suburbs—doesn't it all seem a little over the top? Just because a kid starts flashing shadow puppets with his hands, does it mean he's dealing dope? If he talks like Tupac, does it mean he's smacking his classmates after school? "Kids pose. They want to pretend to be part of something," says Josh Ajima, a teacher at Dominion High School in Northern Virginia.

Many classroom teachers say that they're overwhelmed with "wannabes," who are definitely annoying, but not necessarily illegal. By definition, a gang member must be engaged in criminal activity.

"I can't stand people who tap-dance around problems and say there is no problem. But I think this is such an over-dramatized issue," says Pam Smith, a Northern Virginia teacher with 20-plus years of experience. Smith had a student recently suspended for two weeks for spraying "gang-related" graffiti in school. "He's a great kid, so naïve. He's as much a gang member as my 80-year-old mother!"

But Emily Tusin tells a different story. Tusin, a second-year elementary teacher in suburban Wheaton, Illinois, home to the Billy Graham Center and the most churches per capita in America, knows she had a gang member in her classroom last year. "He was a new kid and he came in with notches in his eyebrow to show he was a member of a gang. He came right in, saw another kid—who he didn't know—and he actually punched that kid in the face because he was wearing the wrong color."

Both Smith and Tusin are likely right. Would-be gangsters are walking around on campuses, as are the real deal. What's important is to learn the difference. "Keep your eyes and ears open. If you get any kind of inkling that a young person is involved in gang activity—gang graffiti on their notebook, they're wearing colors, hats—talk to your local police," advises Wheaton Deputy Chief Tom Meloni.

"It might be nothing more than a comic book club, but the best course of action is to be vigilant," he says. "The more you tolerate, the worse it gets. And once they get entrenched, they're very difficult to eradicate. I worked in South Central L.A.—I know!"

GANGSTER 4 LIFE

Once a kid gets into a gang, there are basically two ways out: the back of a police car or a hearse, Castellanos says. "Unless a parent has the resources to pack up and move, there really aren't any options," he adds.

Prevention is the key. If you're a parent, get your child's MySpace password, he urges. Gangs do recruitment and organization on social networking sites. He's not a big fan of gangster rap. Nor does he care much for gang-related video games, like the Grand Theft Auto series. "Would you let a sex offender in your house? Would you invite a gang member into your house? That's what you're doing when you buy these games for your kids."

Ask your kids where they're going, who they're going with, and what time they'll be home. Most of all, as parents and educators, seek out ways to spend time with kids and involve them in after-school activities, he says.

Dan Korem, the Dallas-based author of *Suburban Gangs: The Affluent Rebels,* has found success with a prevention program that partners at-risk kids with "protectors," usually teachers. That person promises to call the student every week and stop by twice a month. "How could an hour have so much impact?" Korem asks. "Because so many kids don't have anybody in their corner. That small amount of time has an out-of-proportion impact."

Kids join gangs for a variety of reasons—including money and access to drugs—but the primary one shared by members in inner-cities, suburbs, and country towns is this: A sense of belonging.

"When you go into some of these homes and see the way these kids live—they have everything they want!" Castellanos says. "But they don't have everything they need, which is love." nea

PHOTOS: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.

Videos

Know what your kids are reading and watching, Castellanos advises. There are plenty of "bad influences" out there that glorify gang life.

Graffiti

Gang graffiti is "like the gang newspaper," Castellanos says. You can read it for news of fights and more.

Shoes

If you're a gangster, "NB" doesn't mean "New Balance." It stands for something far more provocative. And check out the laces—it's a way to wear a gang's colors.

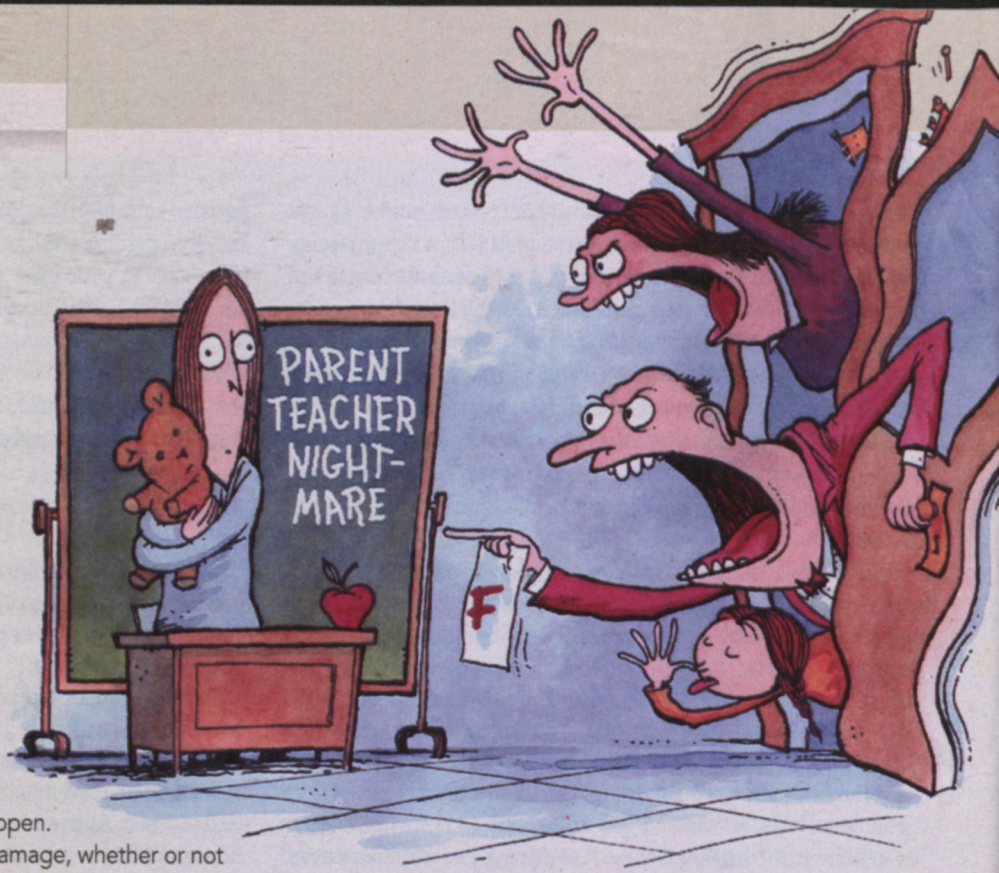
On the Web

WHAT'S UP WITH THE HATS? AND WHAT OTHER GANGWEAR ARE STUDENTS SPORTING? TEST YOUR GANG IQ WITH OUR QUIZ AT WW.NEA.ORG/REF?/GANGS. WHILE THERE, YOU CAN BRUSH UP ON GANG SLANG WITH OUR GLOSSARY.

HOW CAN YOU DEAL WITH ANGRY PARENTS?

Very carefully.

BY ALAIN JEHLEN



Dad and Mom, eyes wild, barge into your room screaming, "How dare you give Susie an F?!"

Susie smirks. The class cheers. The principal walks in.

OK, that's probably not going to happen.

But furious parents can do a lot of damage, whether or not there's any basis for their anger.

So in case Dad and Mom ever do show up mad, here are some ideas on how to cope, and maybe even turn the encounter into an opportunity for everybody—parents, kid, and you—to do better.

Our advice comes from experienced teachers we contacted, from NEA members who posted their ideas on an nea.org discussion board, and from Jerry Newberry, head of the NEA Health Information Network, who used to train teachers to work with parents.

Success, they agree, depends on moving from confrontation to problem-solving.

That may not always be possible. "Sometimes parents are angry about other things in their lives and choose to take it out on teachers," wrote Leadville, Colorado, sixth-grade science teacher Peggy Pothast. "In that case, there is nothing you can do but let them vent."

But these techniques can greatly improve your chances of moving beyond the venting.

If possible, before meeting with the parents:

Document the child's problem behavior and your conversations about it.

"I document every time I talk with a parent or a student and keep enough details to answer questions," says Leavenworth, Kansas, elementary school counselor Janice Troyer.

If you want parents to help you get the homework turned in, you need to tell them how often it hasn't been, because their child is not likely to 'fess up.

"A lot of kids, if they are not doing well, will hide information from their parents," says Newberry. "So the parent is missing information. The parent's tendency is to defend the child and assume the teacher is wrong. Then the teacher gets defensive. The solution is concrete evidence."

Don't talk to a parent—or write—when you're mad.

"Never ever reply immediately to an angry e-mail," says Linda Robb, a high school English teacher in Indianapolis. "Wait. Do not delay more than 24 hours, but give it time. And then call them instead of writing an answer."

Talk to other teachers who work with the child.

Often, a student with academic problems in one class is finding success in other subjects. If so, you want to be able to let the parents know. That may help them feel less defensive when you describe their child's performance in your class.

Decide what you want to come out of the meeting.

"Don't let the only goals at the meeting be the parents' goals," says Newberry. "They may just come in and yell at you because they think you've been unfair. Your goals should be child-centered—a clear plan of action.

At the meeting:

Start on a positive note.

"Robert is doing really well in _____."

Remember? That's why you talked to other teachers beforehand.

"Many parents come to a conference highly defensive," says Newberry. "Year after year, for 12 or 24 conferences, maybe all they've heard has been bad news. You have to be different: 'I'm here to help your child be successful.'"

nea.org

FOR MORE ADVICE FROM YOUR COLLEAGUES AND NEA HIN DIRECTOR JERRY NEWBERRY, VISIT WWW.NEA.ORG/REF?ANGRYPARENT.

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID CLARK; PHOTO: SARA DAVIS

Don't propose your solution first.

If the teacher lays out a plan, there's a good chance the parent will come back with, "We tried those things and they were an utter failure," says Newberry.

Instead, he advises, ask the parents to explain what's been done in the past and whether it worked. "Often a meeting fails just because the teacher talked first," he says.

Use 'active' or reflective listening.

"I hear you saying _____. Is that correct?" That's how Diane Postman, an early childhood special education teacher in Gloucester County, Virginia, summarizes this very effective technique, which lets the parent know you're sincerely listening. It also makes sure you understand.

"Often, the angry person is part right and part wrong," notes Postman. "If you begin by agreeing or acknowledging what they are saying, they will calm down."

Describe the problem in behavioral, nonjudgmental terms.

"Robert is not turning in his homework."

"Janet is distracting the students she sits next to. She argues with me and won't follow rules."

Don't bring the student in until you and the parents are on the same side.

If the parent is upset, it's better to work that out before the child is in the room, says Newberry. "Children need to see their teacher and parents singing off the same song sheet."

Agree on specific steps that you and the parents will take.

Pick two or three practical steps each of you can take. "Perhaps you and the parents can use a school Web site to communicate about schoolwork," says Newberry. "You will post the assignments, and the parents will check the site to see what's due and sign off on each completed task. You'll follow up with them when something isn't handed in."

If you're going to find something out for the parent, tell them when you'll get back to them.

After the meeting: Follow up.

Agree to meet again, or at least to talk, in a few weeks. Don't wait half a semester to find out how your plan needs to be adjusted.

If you're unable to get information that you promised by the date you set, call them anyway with a progress report.

TOP TIPS

An Ounce of Prevention

BY BILL FERRITER

Parents rarely intend to be the flame-breathing creatures you see in your nightmares. Here are three ways to build a positive relationship:

RECOGNIZE THAT PARENTS ARE VALUABLE PARTNERS.

Parents know a lot about their children. They have spent years nurturing and supporting the students whom you've sometimes just met! Ask for their thoughts and advice. Recognize them as experts and treat them as respected equals. Not only will you score points, you'll learn valuable information that will help you to do your job better.

ADMIT YOUR MISTAKES.

You make thousands of split-second decisions every day. Who was pushing in the lunch line? Was a child being honest? Were the directions for assignments clear? Was I too harsh? Sometimes you make the wrong decision—you're human! Nothing is more damaging to your relationship with parents than to deny this reality. So apologize and move on.

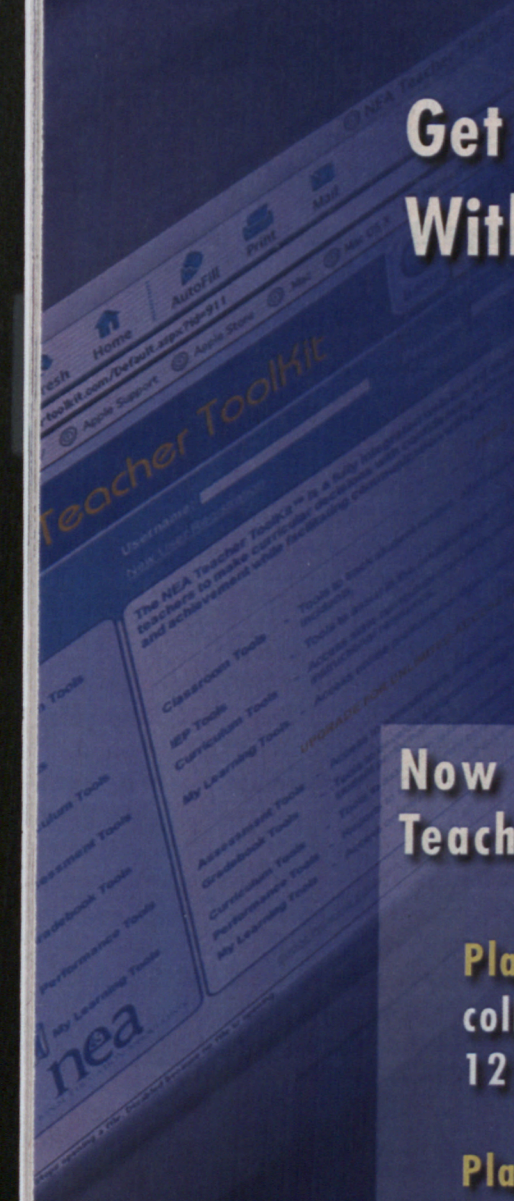
COMMUNICATE EARLY AND OFTEN.

Parents are passionate about their children. They want to know what their strengths and weaknesses are. They want to hear what you are teaching in class, what the homework is, and how they as parents can extend and enrich learning at home. Yet often their only source of information is a cryptic conversation with a distracted 12-year-old—or, worse yet, picking through the pile of papers in the bottom of a backpack. (It's grungy down there!) Communicate with parents through e-mails and maybe a class Web site. Make phone calls—both to express concerns and to celebrate successes.

BILL FERRITER, (shown below in center) is a sixth-grade teacher from Wake County, North Carolina, and is active in the Teacher Leaders Network. His blog, *The Tempered Radical*, was named "Best Teacher Blog" in 2007 by EduBlog. This article is adapted from *Teacher Magazine*.

NEA Teacher ToolKit™

www.neateachertoolkit.com



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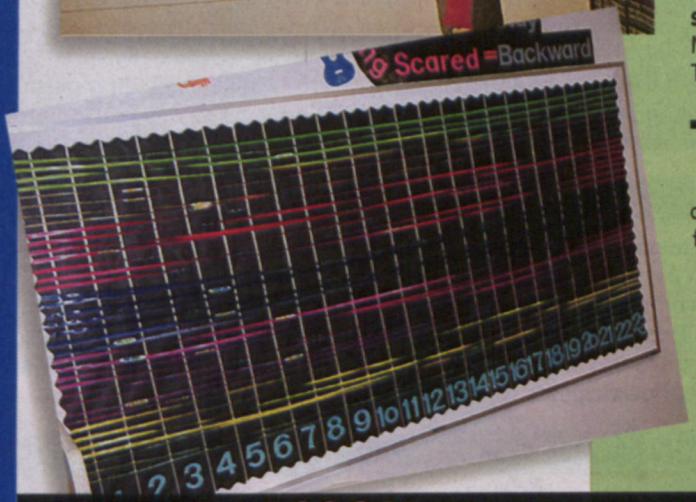
Great Public Schools for Every Child

TOP TIP

Fluency Phones

A parent volunteer made my class a set of fluency phones (PVC pipes with corners glued on) for minimal cost. Students read out loud to themselves and can hear themselves clearly, but the room stays relatively quiet. This year my sixth graders are spending 5–10 minutes a day reading with them, working on specific goals. For example, for two weeks I had them taking deep, gasping breaths at each period, and smaller breaths at commas. We continue to work on building vocabulary and word attack skills, but the biggest improvement in student reading has been from the students being able to hear themselves read aloud.

SHAUNA HAWES
Sixth-grade teacher
Pleasant Hill, California



BEST BOARDS

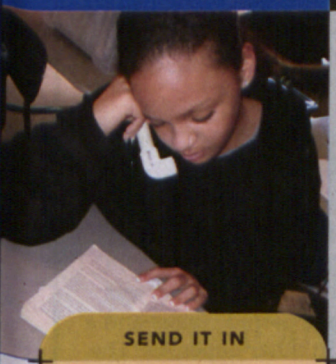
After a study of Asian art and culture, students tried their hands at ink blowing in art class and haiku in English class to make one of our most attractive bulletin boards. One student created a colorful rendering of a Japanese woman, and another brought in a flowered umbrella. The two classes working together made this special project fun and educational.

SYLVIA OBERLE
Middle school English teacher
Thorpe, Wisconsin

To keep my classes motivated with good behavior, I created a board that tracks them in a skateboard race against each other. If a class has excellent behavior, its skateboard moves forward one column. Acceptable behavior means they stay put. Unacceptable moves them back one. The first class in each grade to finish gets a music room party. I often hear kids encouraging each other to strive for an excellent rating.

ADAM HALLAM
K–5 music teacher
Las Vegas, Nevada

GREAT LESSON



Morning Web Report

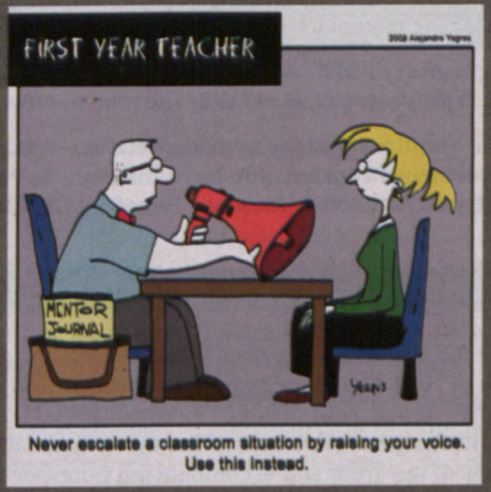
Each morning we have quick presentations from our Internet reporters. The class meteorologists give a local forecast from weatherunderground.com. Other students record the weather data and at the end of the week, we graph the results. The class historian looks at this day in history at historychannel.com/thisday and the current day's news at nytimes.com/learning. Certain students are chosen to quiz the class on current events. All of these Web sites are bookmarked on our home page and the students have their Internet accounts set up to come up to this page. The class historian and meteorologist print out their daily page and we store them in a class book. The students can go back and look at the year's weather and history in their spare time.

JENNIFER HARPER
Third- and fourth-grade teacher
Proctorsville, Vermont

SEND IT IN

WANT MORE GREAT LESSON IDEAS AND TIPS FOR THE CLASSROOM? OF COURSE YOU DO!

Head to **neatoday.org/tips**. And don't forget to sign up for our weekly Works4Me e-mail with more questions, answers, and practical classroom tips like the ones you'll find there. Just send the message "subscribe Works4Me" (without the quotation marks) to **LYRIS@LIST.NEA.ORG**

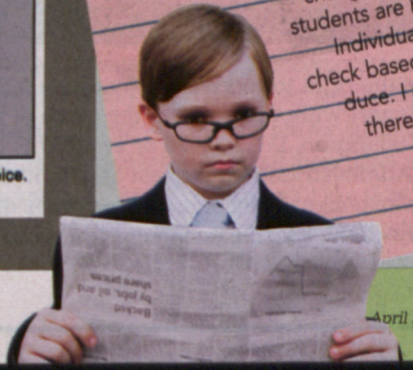


Never escalate a classroom situation by raising your voice. Use this instead.

COLLEAGUES HELPDESK

I constantly tell my sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders that the only job they have at this time is to get a good education and prepare for college. With that in mind, I want to change my classroom into a business where students are hired by AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and earn a paycheck based on the quality of work they produce. I am looking for any suggestions. Is there someone who has used this idea?

E-mail **Carolyn Anderson** Glen Burnie, Maryland, at cmanderson@aacps.org



PHOTOS (FROM TOP): SYLVIA OBERLE, ADAM HALLAM, SHAUNA HAWES
CARTOON: ALEJANDRO YEGROS; BOY: DIGITAL VISION; GLOBE: WWW.WUNDERGROUND.COM

NEA MEMBERS INSURANCE TRUST PLAN®

2006 SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT

(Trust Plan Year Beginning September 1, 2006)

The following is the summary annual report for the NEA Members Insurance Trust® Plan (Trust), Employer Identification Number 52-1126682, including information for NEA Life Insurance® Program, NEA Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance Program, NEA DUES-TAB®, and NEA MemberCare® Medicare Supplement Program for period beginning September 1, 2006, and ending August 31, 2007. The annual report has been filed with the Internal Revenue Service, as required under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

BASIC NEA MEMBERS INSURANCE TRUST FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The value of Trust assets, after subtracting liabilities of the Trust was $124,168,519 as of August 31, 2007, compared to $114,520,858 as of September 1, 2006. During the Trust year, the Trust experienced an increase in its net assets of $9,647,661. This increase includes unrealized appreciation and depreciation in the value of Trust assets; that is, the difference between the value of the Trust assets at the end of the year and the value of the assets at the beginning of the year or the cost of assets acquired during the year. During the Trust year, the Trust had total income of $101,715,425 including participant contributions of $83,845,019, realized gain of $12,277,699 from the sale of assets, and earnings from investments of $13,997,707. Trust expenses were $92,067,765. These expenses included benefits paid to participants and beneficiaries, administrative and other expenses.

INFORMATION FOR NEA LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM

The Trust has a contract with Minnesota Life Insurance Company to pay all NEA Preferred Term Life Insurance claims and The Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay all other NEA Life Insurance claims incurred under the terms of this program. Because it is a so called "experienced rated" contract, the premium costs are affected by, among other things, the number and size of claims. The total contributions for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2006, and ending August 31, 2007, made under such "experienced-rated" contract were $45,455,825 and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was $37,762,158. The total number of participants was 489,197.

INFORMATION FOR NEA ACCIDENTAL DEATH & DISMEMBERMENT (AD&D) PROGRAM

The Trust has a contract with The Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay all NEA AD&D claims incurred under the terms of the Trust. Because it is a so called "experienced rated" contract, the premium costs are affected by, among other things, the number and size of claims. The total contributions for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2006, and ending August 31, 2007, made under such "experienced-rated" contract were $2,928,880 and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was $2,422,771. The total number of participants was 152,703.

INFORMATION FOR NEA DUES-TAB PROGRAM

The Trust has a contract with The Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay all NEA DUES-TAB claims incurred under the terms of the Trust. The NEA DUES-TAB program is self-supporting and paid by premiums from the NEA Members Insurance Trust funds rather than from Member contributions. The total contributions for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2006, and ending August 31, 2007, were $1,882,612 and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was $2,065,464. Benefits charged, less benefit claims paid, were $1,657,971 which is comprised of incurred but unreported claims and a pooled claim charge. Trust expenses, less benefit claims paid, were $52,318 in premium taxes and $165,939 in other expenses. The total number of participants was 3,101,608.

INFORMATION FOR NEA MEMBERCARE SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM

The total contributions for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2006, and ending August 31, 2007, were $12,243,637 and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was $8,541,672. The total number of participants was 7,150.

A federal regulation, known as the "HIPAA Privacy Rule" requires that we provide detailed notice in writing of our privacy practices. As a participant of the NEA Medicare Supplement Program, you have the right to request a copy of the privacy notice; mail inquiries to NEA Members Insurance Trust, Attn: NEA Member Benefits, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20066.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

As a participant, you have the right to receive a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof for a reasonable charge or you may inspect the Annual Report without charge at the office of NEA Members Insurance Trust, Attn: NEA Member Benefits, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20076 or at the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C. You also have the right to receive from the Trust Administrator, on request and at no charge, a statement of the assets and liabilities of the Trust and accompanying notes, or a statement of income and expenses of the Trust and accompanying notes, or both. The Administrator will state the charge, if any, of the specific document you request so you can find out the cost before ordering.

NEA Members Insurance Trust

the guide ...to living green

> Cheap hints
> Web help
> Eco-goods

LIVING GREEN WITHOUT SPENDING IT

How you can be environmentally friendly—and frugal

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY

It's not easy bein' green, especially when you earn a teacher's salary or struggle to make a living wage. (That recycled timber flooring from an old Adirondack barn? Not gonna happen on a beginning educator's salary.) But it's not impossible to make a few positive changes that will save you money—and the Earth, too, if you think creatively.

"It's absolutely doable!" exclaims Randi Hacker, author of *How to Live Green, Cheap and Happy: Save Money! Save the Planet!* And here are a few ways to get you started:

STOP BUYING BOTTLED WATER. Americans will buy about 25 billion single-serving, plastic bottles of water this year—and nearly 80 percent will end up in a landfill, according to the Container Recycling Institute. "The less plastic you can buy, the better," Hacker says. "And the water that you're getting in that bottle isn't any different from the water in your tap." (Consider selling reusable bottles as a school fundraiser.)

SWITCH TO COMPACT FLUORESCENT LIGHT BULBS. They last about 10 times longer than traditional bulbs—and use less juice. Just a single switcheroo will save about $36 in electricity bills, on average over the life of the bulb, and cut carbon dioxide emissions (a significant culprit in global warming) by more than 600 pounds, according to Energy Federation Incorporated.

EAT MORE POT ROAST! Roasting a chicken for an hour in the oven uses about three times as much energy as tossing it in a slow cooker for seven hours, according to the authors of *The Home Energy Diet*. Toaster ovens or

PHOTO: MEIKO ARQUILLOS

microwaves also are more energy-efficient. (Meat, on the whole, however, does use a lot of energy in its production, so eating less of it also saves resources.)

GIVE UP PAPER TOWELS. Okay, maybe keep a few for greasing your cast-iron pan. But using cloth dishtowels regularly might save a few trees. Consider saying no to tissues, too. A soft cotton handkerchief will be kinder to your nose.

SWEAT A LITTLE. This summer, ease off the air conditioning. Hacker never uses it herself—"Sweat is the body's air conditioner." And, in winter, she keeps her thermostat at 58 degrees when she's out, at 64 when she's home. "Keep piles of blankets near," she advises.

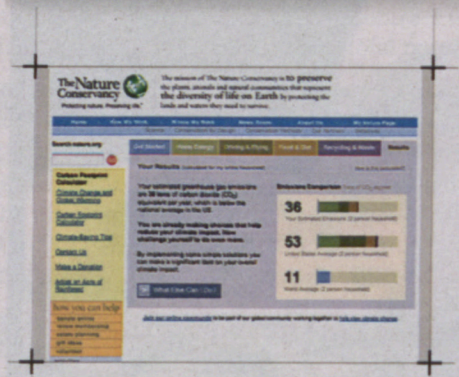
WALK OR BICYCLE. Maybe you can't afford a new hybrid Highlander. (The 2008 MSRP is close to the average annual teacher salary in South Dakota!) Strap on a bike helmet and follow Kathy Dollar, a Maryland special education teacher, who has been bicycling to school since 2000. "I just felt I could be healthier that way," she says. Plus, "It's very positive, going by a gas station and seeing it say three dollars and change for a gallon of gasoline, knowing that I'm not spending that and I'm also helping the environment!"

WRAP YOUR WATER HEATER in an insulation blanket. This is a cinch! And it'll save 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide a year, according to the experts at www.climatecrisis.net. Also consider insulating the 10 feet of hot-water pipe nearest to the tank to further cut your bills.

SAY NO TO SHOPPING BAGS. While paper is better than plastic, reusable totes are best. If you're feeling crafty, steal a stitch from Dollar, who knits her shopping bags. "I probably paid a dollar for the skein," she says. "And it's wearing like iron."

WHAT DO YOU DO TO MAKE YOUR LIFE GREENER? JOIN THE DISCUSSION AT WWW.NEA.ORG/REF?GREENLIVING AND SHARE YOUR OWN TIPS ON SAVING THE EARTH—AND DOLLARS.

Sites to help you tread lightly



Find Your Shoe Size

Measuring your carbon footprint—the amount of climate-changing emissions your daily activities produce—is the first step on the green path. But don't just focus on the actual number. What's key is seeing how your footprint compares to your neighbors', locally and globally, and then working to reduce it. The Nature Conservancy offers a basic calculator at www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator or try the EPA's number-cruncher at www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html, which also lets you see how a few simple changes can reduce your impact.

Green Up Your Plate

Unless you live in California, Florida, or Washington, chances are most of your fruits and veggies travel thousands of highway (or ocean) miles to your table, burning tons of fossil fuels along the way. What to do? Eat as much locally grown and raised food as possible. At www.localharvest.org, search by zip code for farmers markets, grocery stores, and restaurants that sell food from your region. Or, do the same at the Eat Well Guide, which also lists purveyors of meat, eggs, and dairy items produced using Earth-friendly methods (www.eatwellguide.org).

Turn Trash into Treasure

Does the thought of throwing a perfectly good crockpot in the trash rankle you? Check out Freecycle, a nonprofit organization that provides an online meeting place for people who believe reuse is better than recycle (or landfill). Just go to www.freecycle.org to find a local Yahoo group, view the lists of freebies, and post your own, all at no cost of course.

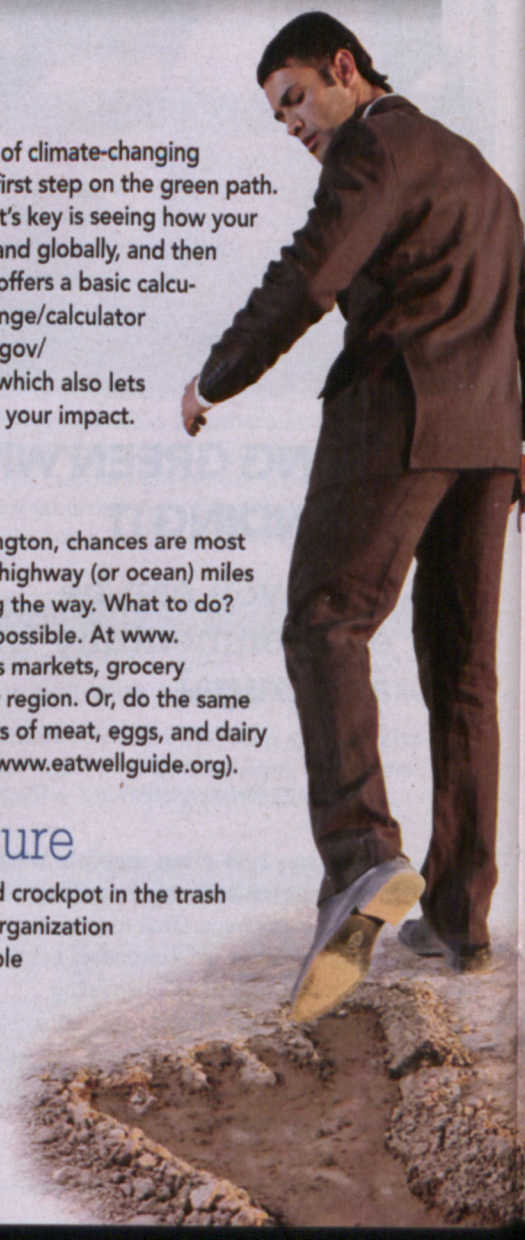
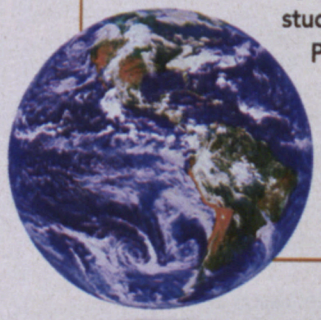
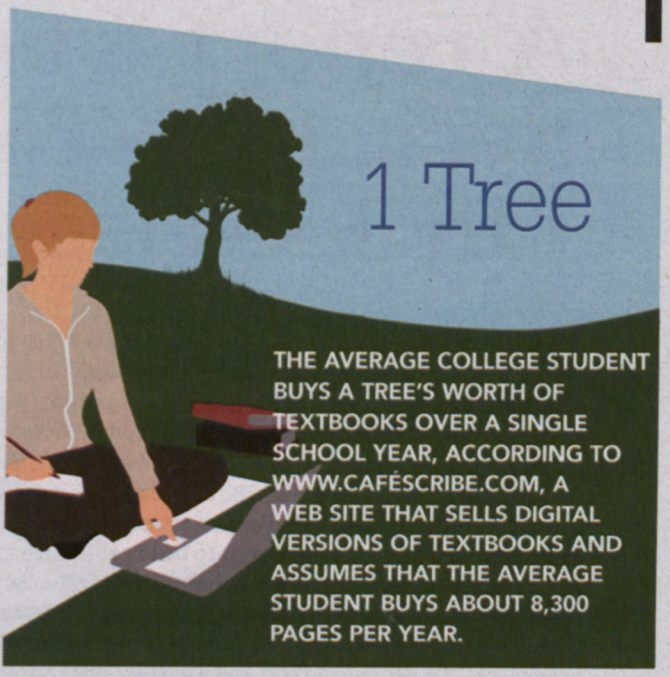


PHOTO: CHRIS CLINTON

HOW I... Save the Earth

Brenda Khayat, a Pennsylvania fifth-grade teacher whose class regularly participates in Earth Force projects (www.earthforce.org), tries to live what she teaches. She packs her lunch in a reusable bag with reusable containers and drinks from a reusable bottle. On Earth Day, her students also will go "garbage-free" at lunch. Like many, she's switched to compact fluorescent light bulbs at home—and this year, her students will be buying them for every Park Forest Elementary family. "All of us fifth-grade teachers feel teaching the students to be good stewards of the environment makes us more environmentally conscious in our own daily lives," she says.




1 Tree
THE AVERAGE COLLEGE STUDENT BUYS A TREE'S WORTH OF TEXTBOOKS OVER A SINGLE SCHOOL YEAR, ACCORDING TO WWW.CAFESCRIBE.COM, A WEB SITE THAT SELLS DIGITAL VERSIONS OF TEXTBOOKS AND ASSUMES THAT THE AVERAGE STUDENT BUYS ABOUT 8,300 PAGES PER YEAR.

Get Greener Goods

A look at eco-friendly products, with comments from green author Randi Hacker.

	A GALLON OF VINEGAR	RECYCLED PAPER TOWELS	COMPACT FLUORESCENT LIGHTS	ORGANIC FOOD	CLOTH DIAPERS
Cost	Cheap! About $3 a gallon.	Marcal towels cost about $2 a roll; Seventh Generation's do too if you buy in bulk.	About $3 each—a good value over the long run.	Expensive	Cheaper than disposables—if you wash them yourself.
Green factor	Great. Instead of dumping detergents with polluting phosphorus into Lake Erie and other fragile waterways, you'll be using a biodegradable substance when you clean.	OK. Recycled paper towels are better than non-recycled, but you could go a step further and try dishtowels instead.	Very good. While they save bundles of electricity, some worry about the mercury (about 4 mg) contained in them. We say take them to your local hazardous-waste facility or IKEA store when they burn out.	Significant. But, to get the most bang for your buck, go organic for foods that typically hold the most pesticides, like apples. Get a guide at www.foodnews.org/walletguide.php.	Probably good. Proponents point to the mountains of disposable diapers in landfills, but critics say the laundering uses energy, water, and harmful detergents—they prefer chlorine-free Seventh Generation disposables instead.
Randi says	Vinegar and water will clean anything!	Switch to recycled toilet paper, too. It's pretty expensive, but it lasts a long time and I think it's worth it.	Be careful how you dispose of them.	I do spend huge amounts of money on food, but I have a small child and I don't want to worry about the hormones in chicken and all of that.	Whatever you choose, be sure to consider all the available information to make an educated decision.

GLOBE: PHOTODISC; STUDENT ILLUSTRATION: RALF HIEMISCH; ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.

A report from NEA Secretary-Treasurer Lily Eskelsen

Lily Eskelsen

As NEA Secretary-Treasurer, I am pleased to report to you figures taken from NEA's audited financial statements for the fiscal and membership year ended August 31, 2007. Once again NEA experienced a positive year in 2006–07.

Our membership increased by an additional 399,464 members in the 2006–07 year. The increase is due primarily to the merger of the NEA affiliate with the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). Our General Operating Fund Unrestricted Net Assets increased by $1,690,782 as a result of net revenues exceeding expenses (Consolidated Net Assets increased by $11,092,500). The increase of Net Assets and continuous growth of new members add strength to our already fiscally sound organization that enables us to build confidence in public education and to advocate for our members' needs.

Each of you should be proud of your contribution in making the NEA strong and responsive to the students we serve and the people who spend their lives in public education. The auditors' opinion letter stated that their work was performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. It is a "clean opinion" issued without any qualifying comments. An unqualified opinion is the best opinion an independent auditor gives.

The Consolidated Statements of Financial Position present the Association's assets, liabilities, and net assets as of August 31, 2007. One important indicator of an organization's financial strength is its net assets (the difference between total assets and total liabilities). Net assets should be a positive balance and sufficient not only to stabilize an organization in troubled times, but also to serve as a source of funds for special projects, future growth, and other fiscal demands as deemed appropriate. NEA's consolidated net asset balance is now over $124.9 million. In addition, NEA has continuously demonstrated a healthy current ratio, which means that NEA is in a solid position to meet its current obligations by using cash and other current assets.

The General Operating Fund Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets reflects total revenues and expenses by strategic goals and operational services areas for the fiscal year 2007. Membership growth, fiscal stability and strength, and sound allocation of NEA's resources combined to make 2006–07 an outstanding year for the National Education Association.

The chart on the opposite page shows a breakdown of how the $153.00 Active Professional and $87.50 Active ESP NEA dues dollars for 2007–08 are allocated to support and represent members and affiliates in their efforts to achieve the mission of NEA.

NOTE: A complete copy of the NEA audit report is available upon request.

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

Consolidated Statements of Financial Position By Fund at August 31, 2007, with comparative totals as of August 31, 2006

	General Operating Fund	Special Purpose Funds	Capital Improvement Fund	Consolidating Entries	2007 Total Funds	2006 Total Funds
Current Assets	$ 90,370,490	$ 46,181,216	$ 29,564	$ (4,380,470)	$ 132,200,800	$ 122,874,586
Long-term Assets	14,722,070	14,553,830	41,500,693	(5,233,165)	65,543,428	71,305,906
TOTAL ASSETS	$ 105,092,560	$ 60,735,046	$ 41,530,257	$ (9,613,635)	$ 197,744,228	$ 194,180,492
Current Liabilities	$ 31,893,722	$ 9,148,763	$ 4,601,676	$ (4,380,470)	$ 41,263,691	$ 42,027,613
Long-term Liabilities	5,516,944	15,927,823	10,106,130	-	31,550,897	38,315,739
Total Liabilities	37,410,666	25,076,586	14,707,806	(4,380,470)	72,814,588	80,343,352
Unrestricted Net Assets						
Undesignated Net Assets	57,038,818	35,658,460	26,822,451	(5,233,165)	114,286,564	99,042,752
Net Assets Designated for Postretirement Benefits	10,643,076	-	-	-	10,643,076	14,794,388
Total Unrestricted Net Assets	67,681,894	35,658,460	26,822,451	(5,233,165)	124,929,640	113,837,140
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	$ 105,092,560	$ 60,735,046	$ 41,530,257	$ (9,613,635)	$ 197,744,228	$ 194,180,492

Your 2007-2008 Dues Dollars

$7.10 ($4.06 ESP)
Governance
Implement an inclusive, engaged governance process that fosters member participation and democratic decision-making through such avenues as the Representative Assembly, NEA Board, NEA Executive Committee, and NEA committees and task forces.

$26.78 ($15.31 ESP)
Administrative Support
Provide for the business operations to ensure organizational effectiveness through technology infrastructure, financial services, facilities services, and human resources to serve the needs of affiliates and members.

$1.15 ($0.66 ESP)
Contingency
Provide funding for emergencies at the national, state, or local levels.

$8.51 ($4.87 ESP)
Improve Teaching & Learning
Advocate for qualified teachers and support professionals in every classroom and worksite; provide strategies for school improvement and to close the achievement gaps, particularly for low income and minority students, through teacher preparation, certification, and development; ethnic minority community outreach; high quality schools; and research and documentation on testing and accountability.

$17.84 ($10.20 ESP)
Legal Support
Implement advocacy programs for members including the Unified Legal Services Program, Fidelity Bond, Association Leaders liability insurance, and a one million dollar member liability insurance program.

$56.79 ($32.48 ESP)
Support Strong States & Locals To Protect Member Interests
Support the UniServ program, affiliate project and assistance grants, and bargaining training. Research will emphasize increased salaries and benefits through tax equity, economic development, and adequate school funding; and compensation and organizing database technology. Recruit and retain members in all categories and produce communications for members and leaders.

$4.60 ($2.63 ESP)
Leadership Development and Constituency Support
Provide for Regional Leadership Conferences, Minority and Women's Leadership Training, constituent group leadership development, support for councils including NCUEA, ESP, Higher Education, NEA-Retired, and the NEA Student Program.

$15.14 ($8.66 ESP)
Legislative and Ballot Initiative Action
Build bipartisan support for public education that includes lobbying, government relations, state ballot initiative and legislative crises fund, cyber lobbyists, member education, and mobilization on political issues.

$15.09 ($8.63 ESP)
Partnerships and Public Relations
Establish new partnerships with diverse supportive organizations and businesses with an emphasis on outreach to ethnic minority communities and family-community organizations. Establish NEA's public image as an advocate for great public schools through TV, radio, print, and cyber news.

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

General Operating Fund — Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets
Year Ended August 31, 2007

	2007
Total Unrestricted Revenues	**$ 312,666,120**
Unrestricted Expenses by Strategic Goals and Operational Services Areas	
Policy and funding for closing the achievement gaps	13,784,653
Increased positive image and support from the ethnic-minority communities	4,255,210
Improved education employees' salaries	2,712,212
Membership growth and affiliate development	13,722,369
Tax and economic policies and school funding ("TEF")	2,536,366
Affiliate programs and services	91,455,508
Economic, legal, political, and professional advocacy	72,640,413
Communications with leaders, staff, members, and the general public	25,225,799
Governance and leadership development	27,006,594
Business operations that ensure organizational effectiveness	57,636,214
Total Unrestricted Expenses	**310,975,338**
Changes in Net Assets from Operating Activities	1,690,782
Unrestricted Net Assets, Beginning of Year	65,991,112
Unrestricted Net Assets, End of Year	$ 67,681,894

resources

41 **Grants & Awards** How many ways could you use a document camera in your classroom? Think creatively and win one.

42 **Take Note** School Building Week is April 28–May 2 (with National Healthy Schools Day on April 28). Is your workplace in the pink?

44 **Diversity Calendar** April 22 is Earth Day. Use this observance as a catalyst to involve students in creating a healthy, sustainable future.

44 **Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits** April is Financial Literacy Month, and we've got resources to help you become a savvy consumer.

46 **On TV** Don't miss a PBS special on Zora Neale Hurston, one of the most pre-eminent writers of 20th-century Black literature.

Deadline Approaching for the NEA Foundation's June 2008 Grant Review

APPLICATIONS ARE DUE BY JUNE 1, 2008, FOR BOTH THE *STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GRANTS* AND THE *LEARNING & LEADERSHIP GRANTS*

Student Achievement Grants provide $5,000 to improve the academic achievement of students by engaging them in critical thinking and problem-solving that deepens their knowledge of standards-based subject matter.

Learning & Leadership Grants provide opportunities for teachers, education support professionals, and higher education faculty and staff to engage in high-quality professional development and lead their colleagues in professional growth. The grant amount is $2,000 for individuals and $5,000 for groups engaged in collegial study.

THE NEA FOUNDATION
www.neafoundation.org

Recipients will be notified by August 15, 2008. Grants fund activities for 12 months from the award date. For more information, including guidelines and applications, visit **www.neafoundation.org** or call (202) 822-7840.

DRIVER SAFETY COMMERCIALS WIN SCHOLARSHIPS FOR TEENS

Bridgestone Firestone has launched the 2008 Safety Scholars Video Contest—a chance for young filmmakers to have their auto safety videos aired as public service commercials. The contest will award three $5,000 college scholarships for the most compelling and effective videos with life-saving messages on auto and tire safety. The top 10 filmmakers will also receive a new set of Bridgestone tires.

Safety videos must be 25 or 55 seconds in length. The first 300 entries will be accepted **May 27–June 24** at SafetyScholars.com. A panel of judges will choose the top 10 based on the following criteria:

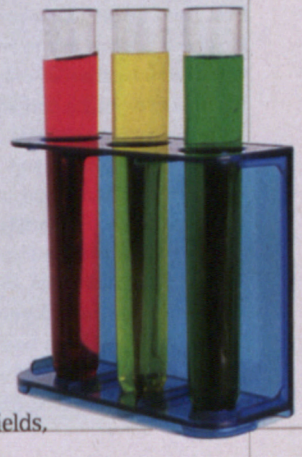
HOW WELL the video compels viewers to be more safety-conscious, including topics such as seat belt usage, tire safety, and avoiding in-vehicle distractions;

HOW WELL it effectively communicates its message.

The top 10 videos will appear on SafetyScholars.com, YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook. Viewers will select the winners through online voting at SafetyScholars.com. The grand prize-winning videos will be announced on August 27 at Safety-Scholars.com. Participants must be 16–21 years old; be legal residents of the United States; possess a valid driver's license; and be enrolled full-time at accredited secondary, college level, or trade schools. For more information, visit **www.safetyscholars.com**.

AWARDS INSPIRE A NEW GENERATION OF INVENTORS

Lemelson-MIT InvenTeams is a national grants initiative of the Lemelson-MIT Program to foster inventiveness among high school students. InvenTeams composed of high school science, mathematics, or technology teachers; students; and mentors are asked to identify a problem to solve, research the problem, and develop a prototype invention as an in-class or extracurricular project. The program is designed to:



EXCITE high school students about science, math, engineering, entrepreneurship, and invention;

EMPOWER students through problem-solving;

ENCOURAGE a culture of invention in schools and communities.

InvenTeams projects have spanned many fields,

PHOTOS FROM TOP: NASA, STOCK.XCHNG

from assistive devices to environmental technologies and consumer goods. Applicants are encouraged to consider the needs of the world's poorest people (those earning $2/day) when brainstorming project ideas. Applying is a two-step process. Applications for the 2009 InvenTeams are available online now.

The deadline for the initial application is **April 25, 2008**. Up to 35 Excite Award recipients will be selected from these applications, notified in the spring, and asked to complete a final application due in September. From these, up to 15 InvenTeams will be chosen and announced in early October. Grants of up to $10,000 per team will be awarded.

For more, go to **http://web.mit.edu/inventeams**.

WIN A DOCUMENT CAMERA

AVerMedia Technologies, Inc. is hosting the AVerVision Lesson Plan Contest for K–12 and Higher-Ed classrooms. Teachers are asked to submit a lesson plan relating to one of six subjects—mathematics, science, English/language arts, history/social studies, art/music, and other—that includes a document camera as the primary technology or demonstration device. Lesson plans will be judged on originality, creativity, and effective use of a document camera in the lesson itself. One lesson plan per teacher will be accepted, which must be submitted online at **www.avermedia-usa.com/presentation/promotion_lesson_plan.asp**. One new CP300 Portable Document Camera plus $1,000 for additional classroom technology purchases will be awarded to the winner of each subject category.

The deadline to submit is **April 18, 2008**. Winners will be announced by May 2. Visit the Web site for a full description of the contest, rules, and submission requirements.

FESTIVAL VIDÉEAU FILM CONTEST

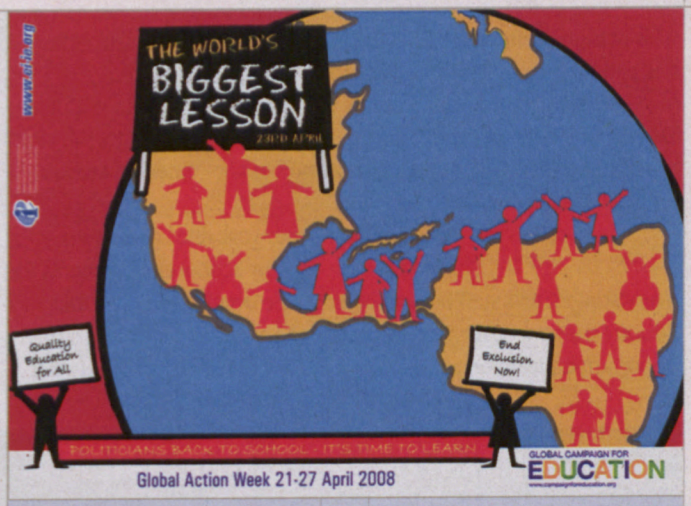
The *Festival VidéEau*—an international video clip competition organized by the Canadian government in preparation for the 2009 World Water Forum in Istanbul—invites young people ages 17–30 from around the world to submit up to 90-second video clips on the theme "Water, People, and Sustainable Development." The theme encompasses the uses for water, its meaning in different cultures, and challenges to manage it properly. Subjects could include the pollution of rivers or water tables, water wastage, problems of access to drinking water and sanitation, the melting of glaciers because of climate change, or action taken by people to preserve the water near their homes.

Pre-selected clips will be submitted to an international jury of experts in water and film who will choose three winners. The first prize winner will receive $2,000; the second prize is $1,500; and the third prize is $1,000. Winners will be announced during the World Youth Congress in Quebec, Canada, from August 10–21, 2008. The best clips will also be screened at various events.

Video clips in MiniDV (NTSC) and DVD (multizone format) ***only*** must be received before midnight on **June 15, 2008**, addressed to:

International Secretariat for Water
7, rue de la Commune O., bureau 203
Montréal (Québec)
Canada H2Y 2C5

Visit **www.i-s-w.org/en/videeau_en.html** for more information.



Global Action Week 21-27 April 2008

Take Note

GLOBAL ACTION WEEK APRIL 23–29

Did you know that worldwide:

80 MILLION CHILDREN are still out of school
770 MILLION PEOPLE cannot read and write
18 MILLION TEACHERS must be recruited between now and 2015 to match the rising demand for education?

This is why teachers and teacher unions have started working together with other like-minded organizations to put pressure on decisionmakers to get these children into school—but the challenges are not restricted to access.

In many countries where school fees have been dropped and education declared free, quality is still a big issue; it is often found that governments do not sufficiently prepare for a free school system. The recruitment of teachers is a pipe dream, teacher training rarely gets off the ground, and new classrooms remain in blueprint form. These factors have major repercussions for the quality of education.

In April 2000 at the World Education Forum, 185 governments committed to provide Education for All by the year 2015. Global Action Week is one of several events organized by the Global Campaign for Education to hold governments accountable for these commitments. During this week, millions of people around the world organize activities in their own countries to remind their governments to fulfill the promises made in 2000.

The theme of Global Action Week 2008 is *Quality Education to End Exclusion*. To find out how you can participate and access free downloadable resources, go to **www.ei-ie.org/globalactionweek**.

SCHOOL BUILDING WEEK APRIL 28–MAY 2

Join the NEA Health Information Network (NEA HIN) in promoting safe, healthy, sustainable environments by participating in School Building Week (April 28–May 2) and National Healthy Schools Day (April 28).

School Building Week is an annual program supported by the CEFPI Foundation and Charitable Trust, the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and numerous other organizations. The purpose of the program is to raise aware-

ness of high performance, healthy, safe, and sustainable school facilities and their connection to learning.

School Building Week features the School of the Future Student Design Competition, a national Walking School Bus, a historical look at our nation's schools, a focus on schools as the centers of community, and National Healthy Schools Day—April 28.

Sponsored by the Healthy Schools Network, Inc., National Healthy Schools Day aims to promote healthy school environments for every student and staff person. Nationwide events take place that educate the community, parents, and school decisionmakers on this important issue. Events that members can sponsor include conducting workshops or meetings for fellow school staff or parents, advocating for school IAQ policies, or celebrating with city mayors or councils by signing an IAQ proclamation.

NEA HIN encourages members to get involved and plan activities. Plan your own event for National Healthy Schools Day and get involved with other aspects of School Building Week by visiting www.healthyschools.org or http://sbw.cefpifoundation.org.

JOINT CONFERENCE ON THE CONCERNS OF MINORITIES AND WOMEN

This year's conference takes place June 28 and 29, 2008, prior to the NEA Representative Assembly, at the Hilton Washington Hotel, 1919 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, DC, 20009.

The theme is *New Era Arising...For Public Education...From the Hill to the Hallways.* Highlights include three keynote speakers; mini-plenary sessions on special topics; four 4-hour Learning Labs on critical issues; and multiple workshops.

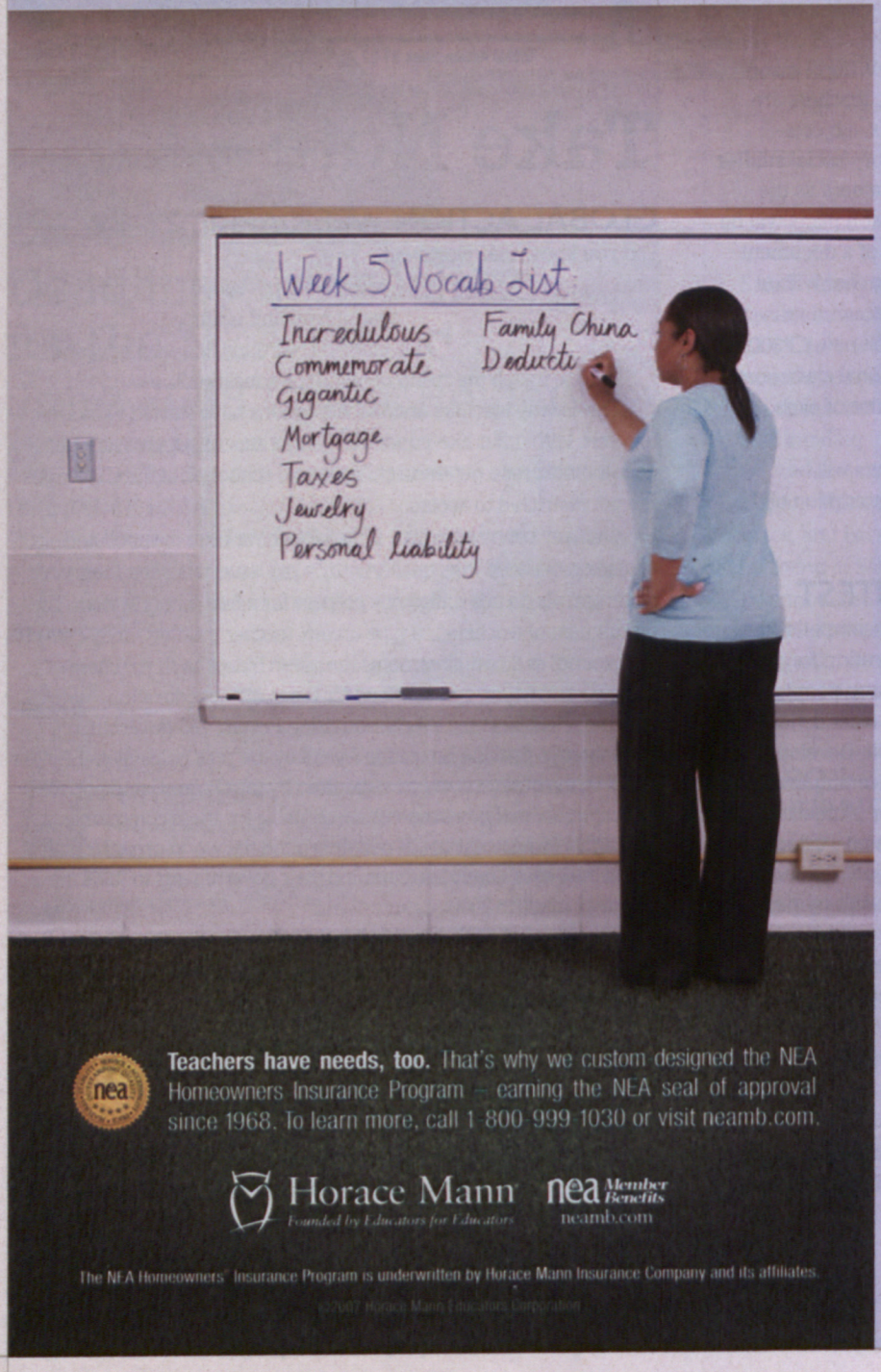
Participation is limited to 800 preregistered members who are delegates to the 2008 RA and 100 preregistered members who are non-delegates. Delegate status will be verified. As in previous years, there is no on-site registration. If you would like information, call the NEA Human and Civil Rights Joint Conference Hotline at (202) 822-7702.

The early registration fee is $110 and must be post-marked by May 5, 2008. Registration after that will be $135; and for mail-in, it should be postmarked by May 12, and faxed by May 19. Registration forms are available on our Web site at www.nea.org/annualmeeting/jointconference.html. You can also call the Conference Hotline to have a registration form faxed or mailed to you.

RA delegates attending the Joint Conference will receive a two-night stay (double occupancy) at the Hilton Washington Hotel for the nights of June 27 and 28. Non-delegates must pay for their own room, and payment must be received with the registration form. Note: No one will be able to call the hotel directly to make reservations—all reservations must be made through NEA Human and Civil Rights.

42ND ANNUAL HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS AWARDS DINNER

The 2008 Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner will be held July 2, 2008, in the Grand Ballroom of the Washington, D.C., Convention Center. The annual gala honors the legacy of the National Education Association/American


Week 5 Vocab List
Incredulous
Commemorate
Gigantic
Mortgage
Taxes
Jewelry
Personal Liability
Family China
Deducti
Teachers have needs, too. That's why we custom designed the NEA Homeowners Insurance Program – earning the NEA seal of approval since 1968. To learn more, call 1-800-999-1030 or visit neamb.com.
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nea Member Benefits
neamb.com
The NEA Homeowners Insurance Program is underwritten by Horace Mann Insurance Company and its affiliates.
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Teachers Association merger; celebrates our Association's multi-ethnic roots; and salutes the human and civil rights heroes of our day. Tickets may only be purchased through NEA Human and Civil Rights on a first-come, first-served basis until May 19, 2008, or until sold out. No tickets will be available for sale on-site. The cost is $65 per ticket or $650 per table of 10. Tickets will be distributed at:

THE JOINT CONFERENCE on the Concerns of Minorities and Women (Washington Hilton Hotel, 1919 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C.) on June 28–29 for individuals and states;

THE AWARDS DINNER ticket booth at the Washington Convention Center on June 30, July 1, and until noon on July 2;

THE WILL CALL DESK at the Grand Ballroom of the Washington Convention Center, just prior to the dinner on July 2.

Ticket order forms are available online at **www.nea.org/annualmeeting/hcrawards**. For more information or a ticket order form, call NEA Human and Civil Rights at (202) 822-7709.

PRE-ANNUAL MEETING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

NEAHIN HEALTH INFORMATION NETWORK

The NEA Health Information Network (HIN) is offering training on school crisis response and indoor environment quality (IEQ) as part of NEA's 2008 Pre-Annual Meeting activities.

On Sunday, June 29 (location to be determined), the School Safety & Crisis Response training will be led by local, state, and national experts in the fields of emergency management and crisis response. Participants will learn the essential components of a crisis response plan, including the Association's role in the development of the plan, essential elements of communication, and how a school district should respond to a crisis both immediately and in the long term.

On Monday, June 30 (location to be determined), "Environmentally Healthy Schools: Protecting Occupants, Improving Performance," will be offered, featuring experts from government agencies and national organizations in the fields of school IEQ, industrial hygiene, and environmental health. The conference will highlight IEQ basics, IEQ and health effects, staff and student performance, and common contaminants such as mold, pests and pesticides, and chemicals. Other important discussions will include organizing around the issue of poor air quality and air sampling.

Both trainings are open to NEA members (delegates and non-delegates) as well as Association staff. For more information, go to **www.neahin.org**.

SCOTOPIC SENSITIVITY (IRLEN) SYNDROME

Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (also called Irlen Syndrome) is a term used to describe a visual perceptive disorder that some researchers say may be related to dyslexia and autism. The Irlen Institute Web site cites research saying nearly half of people diagnosed with a range of learning problems suffer from Irlen Syndrome and can be helped by color filters, worn as glasses or contact lenses, developed by Dr. Helen Irlen.

However, neither the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) nor the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) recognize this condition. These organizations say there is no known visual cause for learning disabilities and no visual therapies that have proven to be effective.

For links to articles on both sides, visit **www.nea.org/ref?irlen**.

"Supporting The NEA Fund is the best vehicle for a public educator advocate to help protect and defend the children, educators and public education in our country. It's like the quote says 'if not now, when? — If not me, who?'"

Fran Valenzuela,
NEA-Retired, Elementary Teacher
Stewart Elementary — Clear Creek ISD
Houston, Texas

Contribute to The NEA Fund for Children & Public Education.
Go to **www.neafund.org**.

THE NEA FUND for Children & Public Education

YOUR RECYCLED CELL PHONE CAN HELP KEEP KIDS SAFE ONLINE

By recycling your cell phone you can assist educators with teaching students about the smart use of the Internet, cell phones, and other forms of telecommunication. The proceeds from recycling cell phones provides the NEA Health Information Network with support to develop resources and tools that educators can use for this project. There are three free and easy ways to recycle your cell phones, PDAs, and chargers:

PRINT a free postage-paid label and mail. Go to **www.sprint.com/projectconnect** and click on "Free mailing label" in the "Related Links" box at the top-right corner of the screen to get a postage-paid mailing label online.

GO TO your local participating Sprint store to pick up a free postage-paid envelope.

CALL NEA HIN at (202) 822-7570 to have free postage-paid envelopes sent to you.

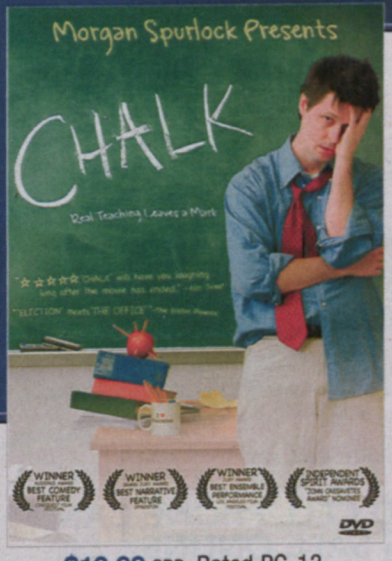
HELP FOR NON- AND SLOW READERS

Need recorded versions of the books you assign so a blind or slow-reading student can keep up with lesson content? You may be able to get them from Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFBD), a 60-year-old organization that supplies books on tape for those who have difficulty reading.

RFBD reports that currently 70 percent of the 185,000 clients they serve—ranging from kindergartners to working professionals—need help because of learning disabilities rather than blindness. The group circulates 500,000 books, and added 6,000 last year alone with the help of 7,000 volunteers using 29 recording studios around the country.

There's more on their Web site at **www.rfbd.org**. You'll find information on membership fees for individuals and institutions and an online catalog so you can find out whether the books you need are available.

"...this view of American high school life from a teacher's perspective feels painfully accurate."
– Stephen Holden, *NY Times*



$19.99 SRP. Rated PG-13

From the producer of *"Super Size Me"* comes a rare and realistic look from a teacher's perspective into the absurd and occasionally volatile world of public education. It delivers an enormous dose of heart, hilarity, and hope for America's most important institution.

Also available from
Arts Alliance America Educational Media

$39.99 SRP

$59.99 SRP

$59.99 SRP

ARTS ALLIANCE AMERICA
EDUCATIONAL MEDIA

To order, visit:
www.aaadvdstore.com

DVD

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Diversity Calendar

APRIL

APRIL 6—FOUNDING OF MORMON CHURCH
On this day in 1830, Joseph Smith Jr. and Oliver Cowdery founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. To find out more, visit www.lds.org.

APRIL 17—FIRST ANNUAL 'POEM IN YOUR POCKET' DAY
Part of National Poetry Month, the idea is simple: select a poem you love, then carry it with you to share with students, co-workers, family, and friends. Go to www.poets.org for more.

APRIL 19–27—PASSOVER
Jewish families traditionally mark this festival—which commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt—by gathering together for a special dinner called *Seder.*

APRIL 20–26—PUBLIC SCHOOL VOLUNTEER WEEK
Encourage parents and community members to visit www.projectappleseed.org and sign the online "Parental Involvement Pledge." Sponsored by Project Appleseed.

APRIL 22—EARTH DAY
This annual event was founded in 1970 to focus public sentiment on the importance of environmental issues. Find resources at www.earthday.net/earthday2008.aspx.

APRIL 23—ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS DAY
A day to honor secretaries, administrative assistants, and other office professionals for their critical, growing, and diverse contributions to the workplace.

Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO RAISE YOUR FINANCIAL IQ?

IT'S APRIL, the taxes are done, and now it's time to relax and wait for the refund check to arrive—*wrong*! April is Financial Literacy Month, a time to brush up on financial basics and move to more "college-level" topics. NEA Member Benefits can help by providing useful resources:

FIRST, our partnership with the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC) gives members access to financial and debt management counseling and education. At **www.neamb.com/debtadvice**, you'll find information on budgeting, "Credit 101," buying a home, dealing with debt, avoiding bankruptcy, and a host of other important consumer topics. But NFCC's "sweet spot" is really the personal financial counseling that's available to members either free or at very reasonable cost. Use the site (or convenient 800 number) to locate an NFCC agency near you!

SECOND, take a look at the free *Investing in Your Future* online courses. With the volatility of the markets, there couldn't be a better time to expand your knowledge of stocks, mutual funds, and the principles of investing. Go to **www.neamb.com/investinginyou.**

THIRD, do the Five-Minute Retirement Check-up at **www.neamb.com/5toRetire** to find out where you are in reaching your retirement savings goals and how to stay on track.

LASTLY, visit **www.neamb.com** for excellent resources, including over 80 financial calculators, educational videos, and access to hundreds of informative consumer articles in the Member Library. You're getting smarter already!

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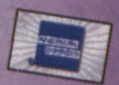

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On TV

AMERICAN MASTERS—ZORA NEALE HURSTON: JUMP AT THE SUN

PBS, April 9 p.m., ET/PT. Check local listings.

Zora Neale Hurston, a daughter of former slaves, was an important writer and cultural anthropologist during the era of the Harlem Renaissance. Her life and experiences with Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and many others are chronicled. Though Hurston died unknown by the reading public, today she is considered essential to the American canon, thanks in part to the efforts of Pulitzer Prize-winning author and poet Alice Walker.

EGYPT: ENGINEERING AN EMPIRE

National Geographic Channel, April 9–10, 6 a.m., ET/PT.

Using computer graphics, this two-part presentation on Egypt focuses on the architectural achievements made more than two thousand years before the Romans. The temples and canals were made without much more than brain power and brawn—but the course of ancient history can be traced by looking at these fortresses and pyramids. This 21st century analysis will help students see antiquity with fresh eyes.

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HUMAN FOOTPRINT

National Geographic Channel, April 13, 9 a.m., ET/PT.

This is an environmental impact statement on a grand scale. Just in time for Earth Day, ABC's Elizabeth Vargas does a monumental "follow"—charting the consumption of one American from cradle to grave. A staggering list of consumables is catalogued for a typical U.S. lifetime (77 years, 9 months), from gasoline to coffee, food, diapers, even toothbrushes. And yes, it all ends up in the landfills, another site on this eco-tour. The special also tells us how to consume differently, and how to make a smaller footprint. Find ideas and activities at www.ngchumanfootprint.com and at www.preserveourplanet.com.

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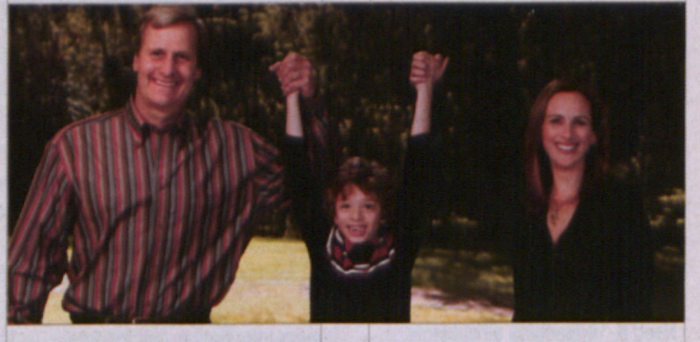
SWEET NOTHING IN MY EAR

CBS, April 20, 9 p.m., ET/PT.

This Hallmark Hall of Fame drama features Jeff Daniels and Marlee Matlin as a couple facing an unusual situation. Their child, born with normal hearing, becomes deaf at an early age. The mother learns to accept the loss because she has been deaf all her life. However, her husband begins to wonder if a cochlear implant operation might improve his son's hearing.

The debate about implants, with impassioned voices on both sides, has been in the public square for years; here is a thoughtful dramatization of what some families actually experience. Find out more at www.cbs.com.



KIDSNET, partnering with educators and the media for more than 25 years, provided these viewing suggestions. Visit www.kidsnet.org.

PHOTOS FROM TOP: PBS, CBS

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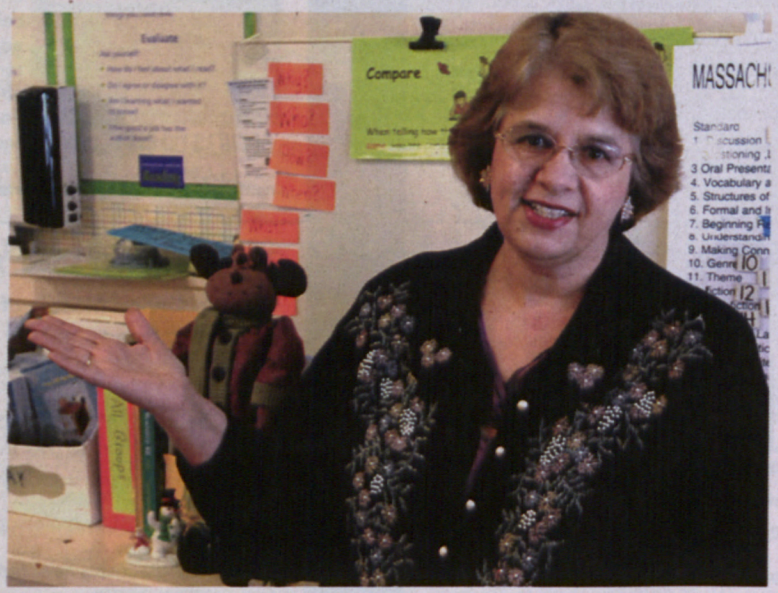
VISITORS

The DOE stopped by to see why I underperform. BY NIKKI CONNERY

I AM STUNNED. A dozen men and women file into my room like a colony of ants, invading every nook and cranny of my second-grade classroom. Poking into files, looking for evidence to prove that I, the teacher, am the reason my students are not passing MCAS, the Massachusetts state test.



Observers from the Department of Education (DOE) want to see if I use "best practices" to teach my 7-year-olds "higher level thinking skills." In this 30-minute period, I must demonstrate that I use probing questions, a technique called "think-pair-share," that I am not the center of attention but a "facilitator," and any and all other current catch phrases. My head is spinning. I cannot concentrate on the little child in front of me.

When my "guests" arrive, my 23 second- and third-graders are working at several centers—learning arithmetic, seeing numbers in different contexts, and writing descriptive sentences, all with the help of colorful, personalized materials that I have spent a great deal of time making for them.

> "I saw 12 figures with clipboards and solemn faces, watching me."

When they finish, they color in a Christmas present that shows the activity they were working on. This may be "too cute" and not what the DOE are seeking.

But that is what I, an individual, bring to my teaching. Just as we are told to differentiate instruction because children are different, I bring to my classroom my strengths and talents, which include art and music.

From my perspective, I see my students working together, engaged, learning. But I am certain the people from DOE are observing through a very different lens. They have their own opinion of teachers in "underperforming" city schools. They pay no attention to the lack of staff and materials, or the neglected physical surroundings—the falling tiles, leaking bathrooms, rodents galore.

Nor do they want to acknowledge the issues in the lives of many of our students, most just learning English, nearly 90 percent poor enough to receive subsidized lunch.

If we mention these problems, we are scolded for saying poor children can't learn. Of course we believe our students can learn. We work hard at teaching them every day, or at least the majority of us do. But we know the barriers.

Whether their parents are extremely young, uneducated, addicted, unemployed, or just have too many children at home, many cannot help their children excel in school. I am always surprised at the number of children who come to kindergarten not knowing any of their colors.

I have seen wannabe gang members wearing their gang colors in second grade. I was beaten by a child at recess when I tried to stop him from banging another child's head into the ground.

The reality is, we teachers provide some of these adorable, innocent, and some not-so-innocent children with the only structure and security they have in their lives.

Why don't we trade places with those teachers in affluent communities whose children do so well on the MCAS, and learn their "more effective" methods, or just have them come to our school and take over for a few months to watch their "best practices"?

When the DOE came in, I am certain they didn't consider the obstacles. They didn't know I have done my best, and stayed at school many nights trying to incorporate what everyone told me to do. I just saw 12 figures with their clipboards and solemn faces, watching me and my nervous class.

Well, I am proud of what I have accomplished. I kept my mind focused on my last scores, which showed my students made a two-year gain in one year, even though many still didn't pass the MCAS.

Hopefully, I have done some good in my 30 years of teaching. This year, one of my students had a fire in her house. When the alarm went off, she was there with her brother and his friends. She told everyone that "her teacher"—that would be me—told her they should all get out right away if they heard a smoke alarm. It warms my heart to think that what I said to this beautiful little girl just may have saved her life.

Nikki Connery teaches at the Chandler Magnet School in Worcester, Massachusetts. Read a longer version of her essay at www.nea.org/ref?Connerylastbell.

PHOTO: CHRIS CHRISTO

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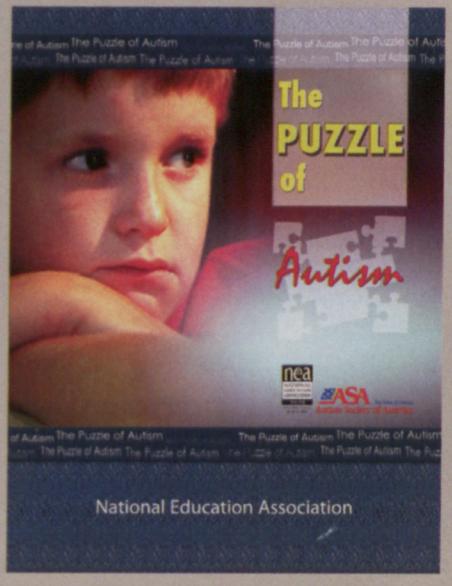

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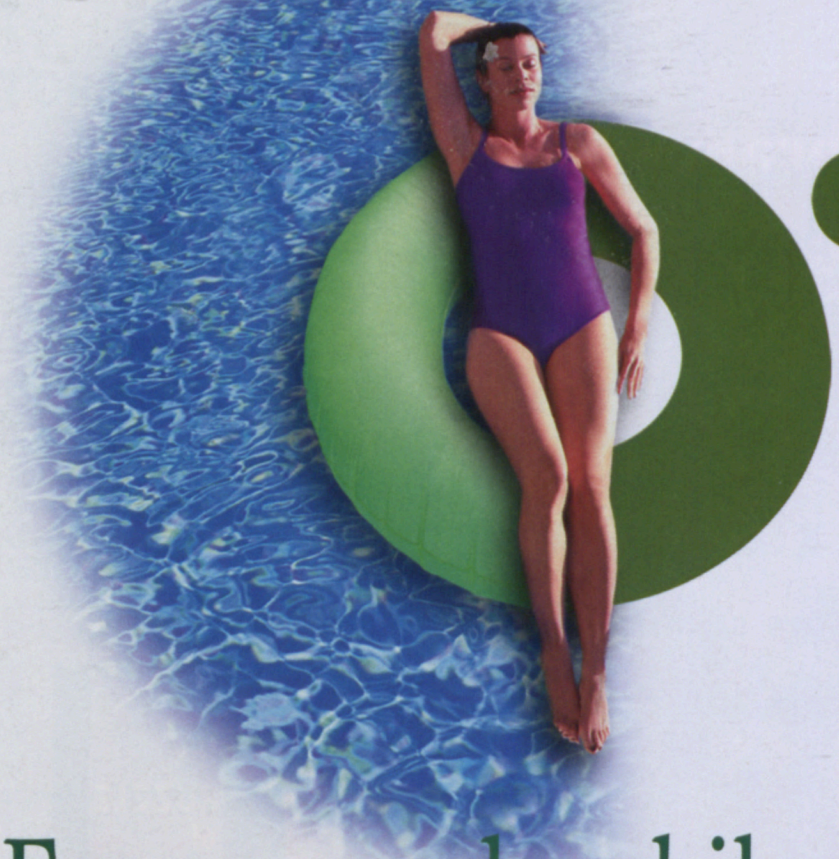

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